

## **CHOSEN PEOPLES**

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DENIS BALY

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**CHOSEN  
PEOPLES**  
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*To*  
MICHAEL CHRISTOPHER KING



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## INTRODUCTION

• **THE MATERIAL** for the greater part of this book first saw the light of day in the form of seven addresses which I was asked to give at the General Assembly of the United Student Christian Council at Heidelberg College, Tiffin, Ohio, in September, 1955. It has also formed the basis for a series of discussion groups for which I was responsible at St. George's Episcopal Church, New York, during January and February of 1956. However, both sets of addresses have been completely rewritten and considerably expanded in this present volume, which I have been asked to prepare as the study book for the United Student Christian Council in 1956.

The fact that this book took its origin from a student conference and is intended as the preliminary study book for a further series of conferences is the reason for three features which may seem to need explanation. The conference of the U.S.C.C. in September, 1955, had taken as the basis of its preliminary study Lesslie Newbigin's book, *The Household of God*, and the addresses I had been asked to give were supposed to take their starting point from that book. This explains why chapters 5, 6, and 7 deal with the three marks of the Church which are so ably presented in *The Household of God*. Those who know Lesslie Newbigin's book will realize that although it provides the basic idea for these chapters, this present book is not intended as a mere repetition of what has already been done so much more capably by someone else, but as a development and application of that extraordi-

narily valuable idea. I say this, both to avoid the accusation of plagiarism and to have a chance of doing what is much more desirable, record my gratitude to Bishop Newbigin for a book which I found extremely stimulating.

Because this book is intended as a preliminary study book for the U.S.C.C. conferences in 1956-7 it has been written to provoke discussion. I have, therefore, allowed myself a somewhat more dogmatic approach than I might otherwise have done, in the hope that this will assist the book to succeed in its purpose. I have also tried throughout to avoid technical theological language, for the students to whom the book is directed are students in all the disciplines and not only in theology. I trust that those who are experts in theology will forgive me if I say that the book is not really intended for them and for this reason does not speak their language.

Finally, my thanks are due to Mrs. Paula C. Green for her kindness in helping with the typing of the manuscript.

DENIS BALY

New York City  
February, 1956

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## **CHOSEN PEOPLES**

**GOD'S PROPER WORK**

AMOS 3:1-8    ISAIAH 6:1-12

ISAIAH 21:1-10    EZEKIEL 33:1-9

MARK 1:14-15    1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

• IN THE BEGINNING—God! This is the statement with which the Bible opens, and any sensible study of the world's affairs must start at the same point. This is the weakness of a great deal of what passes today for education—it begins with you. Now, you may be a very important person, at any rate to yourself. You are certainly a member of three very important groups, this nation, the Church, and your college or university. However, the universe does not take its origin from either them or you; it takes its origin from God, and this is the reason for what this book is going to try to do.

We shall, it is true, constantly raise the question of “you” and of what it means in this day and age for you to be a member of these three interlocking groups, to be, that is, an American, a Christian, and a student, but we shall not begin with these questions. We shall begin with God and with what God says and what he does, and for these our source book must be the Bible, there being no other authority. Therefore, every chapter will begin with half a dozen passages from the Bible, which you are asked to read and think about before you read the chapter itself. These passages have been chosen because they are, so to speak, “key” passages which represent

the thinking of the whole Bible, and they should be read with that in mind. They are not merely isolated examples of some private and specialized point of view.

Now, you may have heard Stephen Leacock's description of the history professor as a man who, whenever he spoke on any subject, had to go back 2,000 years in order to get a running start. That, only worse, is our position. We must go back even further, out of time altogether and into eternity, for it is quite impossible that we should consider the nature of this world unless we first consider what God did when he made the world. This places us in a difficulty, because here in the West we have, to a very large extent, lost all idea of what it means that God should be the Creator. We have lost this sense of unlimited, infinite power endlessly streaming forth and maintaining the whole universe in being. For God is rather like the sun. We human beings are utterly dependent upon the sun. It makes our weather; it makes us live; it makes the plants grow. It never stops pouring out life-giving power, whether by night or by day, whether we can see it or not. It is quite true that if the sun were to stop—literally to stop—just for twenty-four hours, then everything that we know would cease to exist. It is only this continuous, unending outpouring of power that keeps us going at all.

And God is that—eternal, unlimited, infinite power, constantly streaming out and maintaining the whole universe in being. Because of this constant streaming out of power the universe started; because of this power it continues to be. If the power were to pause, only for a moment, all the universe—not just we, but the farthest nebula in outermost space—would just cease to be in that instant, and the whole immeasurable glory of creation would become as if it had never been. "When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath, they die" (Ps. 104:29). That is what God means. He is power—utter, absolute power. Not



merely the Father, but God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You will doubtless recall the parallel between the opening words of Genesis and the opening words of the Fourth Gospel: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and "In the beginning was the Word." "The Word" is the power of God. It has throughout the Bible rather the character of electricity. Something is said here, as it were the turning of a switch, and at once an explosion takes place somewhere else. "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29). "My word shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose" (Isa. 55:11). The psalmist says, "He sends forth his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly," and again, "He sends forth his word, and melts them" (Ps. 147:15 and 18). This is what John means: "In the beginning there was with God dynamic power; indeed, it was God." (See John 1:1.)

We are faced here with a situation hinted at elsewhere only in science fiction and hardly even there. This is power which streams forth, not because it is sent, but because of its own will and volition it *wants* to. It is power *that thinks*. This is what God is—intelligent, active and, moreover, righteous power, power that must of its own nature fight against evil, power which cannot, in any sense at all, be controlled or subdued. When we read in some book of science fiction about an overwhelming power from outer space invading the earth, we can always close the book with the comfortable thought that it is not true. But the claim of the Bible is just this—that it is *true*, that it is not fiction. That is a claim which should make each one of us put down this book for a moment in his lap and wonder whether everything he has been doing until now has not been folly. It is a claim which is fundamental to all that follows.

### • LIMITS AND FRONTIERS

"In the beginning God created." Exactly so. But what did he create? He created space and time. He created finiteness. He created limits. He created the universe. Here is the crisis, for what God did could almost be called a logical impossibility. The mere fact, indeed, of creation is nearly incredible. Infinite power cannot create what is infinite and yet separate from itself, for that would be to create a god, and even God cannot make a god. "My glory I give to no other," says God (Isa. 42:8), and in saying it he is stating no more than the literal truth. There can be only one God. The fact that God, who is infinite power, has created the universe, therefore, involves that infinite power and love and righteousness shall henceforth squeeze itself somehow into a place that has a beginning and an end and a top and bottom and sides. If you have ever tried to get the toothpaste back into the tube, you will have some faint inkling of what this means. From the time of the creation of the universe onwards God must work within limits. This is the curious fact which explains much of the difficulty people today have in believing in God. What they dislike is not so much God as the limits within which God works. They dislike the fact that he works through a particular people; they dislike the fact that he reveals himself to them only little by little, so that, as they say, very much of the Old Testament is sub-Christian and bloodthirsty. What they forget is that this is the central problem of creation. It is, so to speak, God's problem. After all, his nature is to be infinite and unlimited. Yet, because whatever he makes must have limits of some kind, and cannot itself be infinite, the moment that God makes something, his infinite power and love must be challenged by the frontiers and boundaries within which it is forced to work.

However, frontiers and boundaries there must be, even more stringent limits than those required by the fact of creation



alone. There is always in the Bible the sense that if the full power of God were ever to be unleashed upon the earth the results would be disastrous. Throughout the Exodus, when this power was shown forth triumphantly for all generations to come, when the Lord God went before the people of Israel as "a devouring fire" (Deut. 9:3), the people before whom he went had always themselves to be protected from the power. It was their constant cry, "Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the Lord, shall die. Are we all to perish?" (Num. 17:12-13). Therefore, Moses tells the people, "I stood between the Lord and you, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid . . ." (Deut. 5:5). Indeed, they had reason to be afraid. It was by the commands of God himself that bounds were set round Mount Sinai to prevent the people coming near, "lest the Lord break out upon them" (Exod. 19:22). Moses is at times spoken of almost as if he were the one obstacle to the unleashing of God's power, as if God felt hampered and hindered in the exercise of his power by the fact that his mouthpiece was standing there between him and the people. "Get away," he says to Moses, "from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment" (Num. 16:45), and more than once Moses takes it upon himself to remind God that these are the limits within which God has chosen to work (Exod. 32:11-14; Num. 14:11-25).

Now, it is always possible at this point to lean back in one's chair and say, "Ah yes! Anthropomorphism!" or perhaps, "A typical example of the *tabu* mentality in a primitive community." In fact, if you are taking a course in anthropology or comparative religion, that is just the kind of remark that you are likely to make. You could be right, of course. Possibly the story of the Exodus does show these features. But that does not alter the fundamental truth of what the story

is claiming—that potentially dangerous power is here limited and is to be seen acting within these limits, not in any way because men have been able to get it under control, but because the power is prepared of itself to accept the limits. This is the extraordinary claim of the Bible. There is nothing extraordinary about power being dangerous. In fact, *all* power is dangerous and *all* power is destructive if it is not checked. Nothing at all can alter that fact. Power must always try to destroy what opposes it. Heat must fight against cold; light must fight against darkness. Indeed, it goes further than that, for even the beneficent sun itself, from whose power, as we have seen, all life on earth is derived, would soon destroy that life, if the earth were not given some protection. Therefore, the earth must remain millions of miles away from the source of its life and must be set to spin upon its axis so that for half of every day men may take refuge from the thing which maintains them in being. But no bounds can be set to *infinite* power which the power itself does not choose to set. All bounds which are not of its choice must be swept away and annihilated in a moment. It is no good wishing that this were not so. It is so and it has got to be so. No other possibility exists.

Therefore, it is inherent in the very fact of creation that the creating power, in order not to destroy what it has created, must choose to impose limits and must never cease for a moment to accept the limits. They cannot be accepted in one area and rejected in others. The power cannot say, "I will accept the limits of time where my activity is concerned, but not the limits of space or of human individuality," because whenever power is unlimited it becomes destructive. This is not because the power wants to be destructive; it may be entirely beneficent, but the plain fact of the case is that the recipient of the power just could not stand it. Consequently, the really extraordinary statement of the Bible is that God

created, with all that this involves. It is stating that power—unlimited, infinite, eternal power—chose of its own free will to set limits and to act within these limits. It states that eternal, unlimited power chose to contradict itself, to check its own power and to limit its own unlimitedness. This statement that unlimited power chose thus to deny itself is the statement from which all else follows.

### • THE NECESSITY OF REVELATION

The second necessity of creation is that there shall be revelation. This is one of those “theological” words which often frighten people who are unused to them, but it is really quite simple. What it means is that if what is created is going to know anything at all it has got to be taught by its Creator. Of course, very much of the universe is both unknowing and incapable of knowledge, but this is not true of men. Whether scattered throughout the universe there are other beings which, like men, can think and know, we cannot tell, but, if there were such beings, they could not know from within themselves any more than we can, because, as the writer of Genesis saw clearly, if we were to know of ourselves, we would be like God, and that is a contradiction in terms (Gen. 3:4). No created being can be born knowing the truth. Admittedly, there is a certain instinctive knowledge which seems to be part of the birthright of many animals, but this is not the kind of knowledge that we mean. In any case, it appears true that instinctive knowledge becomes less with the higher animals and man himself has relatively little. Every man, therefore, who is born into the world must acquire his knowledge the hard way; he has not got the knowledge to start with and it must come to him ultimately from God himself, that is, from the source of knowledge. There is no other way of knowing. Yet, since part of the limitations of creation is the fact of time, the spreading out of the world between a

beginning and an end, so all knowing must be a learning, a beginning and a growing in knowledge. The intended end is certainly that we "shall understand fully, even as we have been fully understood" (1 Cor. 13:12), but because we are still within the limits of time we know only "in part."

Even within the created world itself knowledge must often come by sheer revelation. All knowledge, we have agreed, must come by learning, but this learning can take the form of pure scientific inquiry only when what is being studied is without intelligence of its own. Where the object of our study is able to choose between two or more courses of action because it can reason out why one course is preferable, we can know for certain what went on in its head only if it tells us. Without that we are limited to theories, intelligent or otherwise. Even Pavlov's famous dog experiments give us only a guide to canine thought. We cannot establish as a cold, hard, scientific fact what dogs are thinking.

This is especially true of human beings. We cannot really know another man unless he is prepared to tell us about himself. We are probably all of us acquainted with the kind of person about whom we say, "He's a pleasant sort of guy, but somehow our conversation is always on the surface. I never really seem to know what he's thinking." Even the most acute and highly trained psychiatrist finds himself checked in this way. He may learn a great deal about John Smith by observing the way in which John Smith behaves, but he cannot learn everything in this way and if John Smith is unwilling either to answer questions or to volunteer information about himself, then the psychiatrist is forced to make the regretful comment in his case-book, "Nothing could be learned about the patient in this area." There are ways, of course, of breaking down this resistance, but until the revelation can be provoked, the knowledge will not be forthcoming.



What is true of men is true of God, only more so. We may learn a great deal by observing the created universe, which in a sense is similar to observing God's behavior, but that gives us no more than a guide. We cannot know God in any true sense of the word at all except as far as he allows himself to be known, except, that is, for what he chooses to tell us about himself. There must, therefore, be revelation and it must be within limits. These are two necessities which both came into being with the very fact of creation.

This, then, is God's Proper Work—the making of himself known to his creation. This would have been necessary even if man had never sinned. It is true that the only world we know is a world in which all men are in some way spoilt and marred by sin, and that therefore God's revealing of himself takes the form of his revealing himself as a Savior, but that is not the question with which we are dealing here. He would have had to reveal himself, even if man had never sinned, because from the very beginning there was no other way in which man could know him. Even the fact that he saves us can be known only because he tells us so and chooses to come and do it in front of our very eyes. This revealing of himself is his Proper Work.

This is where the Church comes in. If there has got to be revelation and if it has got to be made within limits—limits of time, of space, and of human understanding—then there has got to be a definite people through whom the revelation is made and they have got to live in a definite place. You may want to object that it was really unfair of God not to reveal himself to all people equally, but that again is objecting to the limits, and this we have agreed is unreasonable. If you disagree, think for a moment what it would be like if the limits had been wider than they are now and if we had to work our way through the Koran, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Egyptian Temple Literature, the Book of the Dead, the

Popol Vuh, the Sutras, the Talmud, the Shinto books, and the Norse Sagas, as well as the Bible, before we could really know God. We are, after all, human beings and our understanding is limited. If God had not been prepared to accept the limits of working through a single people, it is doubtful if we could get to know anything about him at all.

The "Church," therefore, is the "People of God," the limited area within which the revelation is made. It is the channel for God's revelation of himself and it has no right to any activity which does not partake of this character. It exists in order that God may be seen and heard and known—for this and for nothing else. Just as Moses stood between God and the people in order to declare unto them the word of the Lord, so the people stand before the world. "Many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3).

It may be objected that the Church has many functions—pastoral, reconciling, teaching, prophetic, priestly, and so on. This is certainly so, and yet it remains true that if in each of these activities men do not see God, then the activity in which he is not seen stands self-condemned. If the Church has a reconciling function, it is because "all this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18). The Church must seek no credit for herself. Christians do not have this reconciling function because a group of them got together and decided that it would be an excellent idea in this distracted world to form a society of reconciliation. They have this function because they cannot help themselves, because they are a channel through which God makes himself known. Since it is as a loving Father and as a Reconciler that he reveals himself, so Christians are reconcilers also. There is all the world of difference between "practicing your piety before

men in order to be seen by them" (Matt. 6:1) and letting "your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your *Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). Christians have done the job they are here to do when their Father receives glory and adoration from men, who have at last seen him for what he really is.

Now, the "Church" does not mean the ministers of the Church alone; it does not even mean all who work in the parish house or those who have gone out to work as missionaries. It means all Christian people. This is very often said, both from pulpits and in books, but there is very little understanding about what this really means. It means that whenever we use the expression "church-worker," we are denying the true character of the society to which we belong. It means that whenever we urge men and women to come to the parish house for a week-day meeting we ought to think whether we are taking them away from their essential function of being Christians in the hurly-burly of the world's affairs. It is common to judge the "life" of a church by the activity of the parish house, and we are enthusiastic about those worthy people who give up night after night of their time to attend meetings, square-dances, youth activities, box-suppers, Bible classes, lectures, committees of the every-member canvass and all the other many "church" activities. But is it not possible that these are not church activities at all? Is it not possible that the man with the right idea of the Church was the vicar in Sheffield, England, who said bluntly to a young man who appeared at a week-night service at his church, "What are you doing here? Have you forgotten that there is a shop-stewards' meeting at your factory tonight at which you should be present? That is where you should be, making your voice heard as a Christian. You have no right to come to church tonight?"

If we once grasp that the Church—the whole Church—ex-

ists as a channel for God's revelation of himself, and that it is within these limits that he chooses to work, then we surely grasp also that wherever that channel is closed, the chances are that he will not be seen. Christians who are also bankers, lawyers, business men, factory workers, doctors, dentists, or farmers must realize that God is invisible to their fellowmen unless he is visible in their work. It is not that they need to go around talking about God in the first place, though they should be more ready than most of them are to "make a defense to anyone who calls them to account for the hope that is in them" (1 Peter 3:15). It is rather that they need to examine their activity very searchingly to see whether there is anything in it which makes it more difficult for people to see God.

A doctor who dares not face either himself or his colleagues with the possibility that at least one of the reasons why the medical profession opposes socialized medicine may be that they are afraid they will lose money by it, is certainly not making it easier to see God. Indeed, any man or woman in any occupation who feels that he or she can never stand out against the group, be it trade union, professional group or anything else, is guilty of this. Authors who are content with hurried, slap-dash work; newspapers which never hold up a story about whose truth there is some doubt; advertisements designed to rouse desires and envy in the minds of those who cannot afford the goods which are advertised; business men who encourage the development of extravagant expense accounts—all these make it difficult, indeed almost impossible, to see God.

The Christian may well be aghast at this list and say, "Well, what can I do? Everyone does things like this." This is true, and the first thing that a Christian must realize is that he lives and works in what is essentially a non-Christian society and that being busy in the parish house is only too



likely to be for him an escape. Yet it is difficult to see how he is going to realize this, poor man, when all his fellow-Christians conspire to pat him on the back and praise him for his frequent attendance. What the laity need for their salvation is occasionally to be greeted by their minister with the words, "I am sorry to see you here tonight, Jack."

It is distressing to discover how very often, when the idea is put forward that the essential task of the Church is missionary, what this is held to mean for the layman is being serious about his pledging, giving careful attention to personal morality, taking some interest in a school in the Philippines or a hospital in Africa, and being regular in his attendance at the Sunday service. He is felt not to be helping forward the work of the Church if he is not doing these things. There seems to be little understanding of the fact that if Mary Smith is slaving away her life in Public School 27 because as a Christian she feels that it is a job which urgently needs doing, this is the work of the Church, and that to urge Mary Smith to join the chancel guild or teach in the church school would be to hinder the Church's work. This is surely very much of what is meant by "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). It is not merely, as we so often take it to mean, that when we hold a little prayer meeting Christ is present with us, but also that wherever in this sub-Christian society a tiny handful of Christians are at work struggling so to act that God may not be completely hidden from the others, there is Christ; there is the whole power of God pulsating through a tiny, fragile channel and at times almost wrecking it in the process. This has somewhat frightening consequences, as we shall see in the next chapter, but there is the Church—there and not in the parish house.

It may be said of the rulers, "They prepare the table, they spread the rugs, they eat, they drink" (Isa. 21:5). This, as

our Lord pointed out, is the kind of thing people were doing in the days of Noah and the days of Lot (Luke 17:22-37) and the kind of thing that they will go on doing in their heedless fashion until the world's end. But God's command to his Church is always, "Go, set a watchman, let him announce what he sees." This is true in all spheres of life, because there is no human activity about which men are not complacent, saying to themselves that there is not much wrong. The watch may be long and tedious. We may "stand continually by day" and be stationed at our post whole nights (Isa. 21:8). There is no guarantee that an immense amount of a Christian's life in business may not be frustrating, wearisome, and apparently ineffectual. The occasion when he is called to take a bold stand may not come until after months or years during which no clear challenge was presented, but there is no excuse for the Church to give up the job.

We must go on endlessly "until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without men" (Isa. 6:11); we must not be deterred even if people do not listen to our warnings (Ezek. 33:1-9); we must say and do only what we "have heard from the Lord of hosts," no more, no less (Isa. 21:10). Our faith rests not "in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:5). We know only this, that when the Lord God has spoken we must prophesy (Amos 3:8). We are his mouthpiece and his hands and his feet. We are but the channel for God's revelation of himself. We do not reveal him. Only God can reveal God. We are the limits within which this revelation is made. What we must do is to take thought whether by our activity we are imposing limits other than those which God has imposed upon himself.



## GOD'S OWN PEOPLE

DEUTERONOMY 9:1-5    JOSHUA 24:14-24

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

MATTHEW 2:1-18; 5:10-12    LUKE 2:22-35

JOHN 15:18-16:4    HEBREWS 13:1-13

• A CERTAIN NINETEENTH century book of etiquette once gave this very delightful piece of advice: "When you are offered a plate of cakes, you should not appear to choose, but a practiced eye will rapidly discern the best." It is in this sense that we use the word "choose" most commonly today and as a result we are rather apt to think of God as having chosen the Israelites in the same fashion, as having looked down from heaven to see which of the many nations who already existed on earth would suit his purpose, and choosing the Jews as being on the whole the most satisfactory. This is not an idea which appeals to us, and we think it very unfair of God to have done it. It is therefore necessary to realize that this is not what he did, for the Bible is very insistent that it was for no good qualities of their own that the Jews were chosen. "Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land' (Deut. 9:4), and again, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7).

It is not even true that God "chose" in our sense of the word at all. Admittedly, the Old Testament does suggest from time to time that that is what God did, but it is always with the sense that he is overruling the more obvious choice. This is true both of nations and of men. Israel is chosen because she is few in number, and again and again the natural choice of the first-born is overruled. Jacob is chosen before Esau (Gen. 27) and Ephraim before Manasseh (Gen. 48:14). "Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead," says the psalmist (Ps. 68:27) and Micah prophesies that Bethlehem, who is "little to be among the clans of Judah," shall produce "one who is to be ruler in Israel" (Mic. 5:2).

A truer picture of God's "choice" is that given in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the writer says that "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), for it was part of God's purposes from the beginning that there should be a people through whom he was to be made known to men, and the word "chosen," therefore, could probably better be expressed by "appointed" or "destined." The Jews were thus an appointed or destined people, prepared by God to fulfill a necessary purpose, and it is the Christian claim that this "chosen" or "appointed" character has passed to us and that upon us is now laid this responsibility. It is therefore of the first importance that we examine what it means to be appointed by God and whether there are other groups of whom it can be said that God has appointed them for the purpose of making known his revelation.

"He chose us in him . . . that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:4). This is the fundamental requirement of an appointed people, that their life should show the same inner integrity which is characteristic of God himself. "Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy," says God to the Israelites (Lev. 11:44) and again, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"



(Exod. 19:5). Moses tells the people, "You are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own possession" (Deut. 14:2), and the same idea is echoed by Jesus, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). It is impossible that any people should be God's people and make him known, if their whole life does not show the same unswerving unity of purpose and character as that displayed by the God whom they reveal, "with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas. 1:17). Therefore, when the people tell Joshua that they will serve God, his first demand is that they put away the foreign gods that are among them (Josh. 24:23). Elijah later insists that the Israelites make up their mind whom it is they are serving, demanding of them, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21). Much later still Jesus was to tell his disciples that they could not serve two masters, for if they had not got this clear unity of vision, their whole body would be full of darkness (Matt. 6:22-24). When he was talking to the woman of Samaria, he told her that God required worshipers who would worship him "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). Only those people who have this integrity as the innermost part of their being are fit for God's purposes.

### • THE COST OF BEING CHOSEN

Now, it follows that no people in their senses would demand this responsibility for themselves. Even Isaiah could say, "Here am I, send me," only after God had cleansed him with fire (Isa. 6:6-8), and Joshua bluntly told the people, "You cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God." Therefore, any group of people, or any individuals, who have reason to feel that God has chosen or appointed them to fulfil some function which he requires to be performed can properly react only by a sort of stunned horror that this burden has been

laid upon them. If we have any idea at all of what we are in for when such a thing happens to us, all that is human in us must cry out against it. Moses' excuses to God at Horeb (Exod. 3:11, 14; 4:1, 10) and the protestations of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6) are the normal response of such men, who are bound to try to escape the responsibility and to say, "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person."

There is, however, a very great temptation for the People of God to forget this and to imagine that God's choice of them is intended for their glory. This was the constant mistake of the Israelites and it earned them the sternest condemnation of the prophets, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). On the other hand, of course, it is true that we must not refuse the call; once the challenge has come, to refuse it would be cowardly and wrong, and so the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses when he asked that someone else should be sent instead of him, and he had no mercy on Jonah when he "rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3). Accept the responsibility we must and say with Mary, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), but we must not forget that she who said that was also the person to whom it was said, "A sword will pierce through your own soul" (Luke 2:35).

To be chosen by God is always costly, and again and again those who are chosen by him say in so many words, "I wish I was dead!" From the time of Moses who said, "Kill me at once, if I find favor in thy sight, that I may not see my wretchedness" (Num. 11:15), through Elijah with his bitter comment, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4) and Jeremiah who cursed the day that he was born (Jer. 20:14) to Jonah who "asked that he might die" (Jonah 3:8), the

witness is the same: to be chosen by God is an intolerable burden. This is true not only of men, but also of cities, groups, and nations. When Bethlehem is chosen all her children are slaughtered by Herod, and the children of Israel, who were brought through the wilderness by God, said that they would rather have died under the tyranny of Pharaoh in Egypt than have embarked upon such a journey (Exod. 16:3). It is difficult to say whether the Servant in the second half of Isaiah was originally intended to refer to a person or to the whole nation, but whichever it was, his situation was the same: "he was despised and rejected . . . and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

This is said, not to cause alarm and despondency in the minds of those who belong to the People of God, but to make it abundantly clear that to be God's people is neither a reward for virtue nor a guarantee of a happy life, and since it is commonly regarded as either one or both of these, this needs emphasizing. We are far too apt sentimentally to ask that peace and quietness shall be our lot and to forget that peace and quietness are not necessarily promised by God to his people here on earth. For despite the popular hymn which says, "Take from our minds the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace," and which concludes, "Breathe through the earthquake, wind and fire, O still small voice of calm," it is doubtful whether this is the kind of thing we ought to ask for. The strain and stress are part of the job and there was, in fact, nothing calm about what the still small voice told Elijah to go and do. Rather, he was to stir up a revolution in both Syria and Israel, "and him who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay"; and him who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay" (1 Kings 19:17).

It is not that we have to be afraid. Far from it. God says to all his people as he said to Joshua and to Gideon, "Be

strong and very courageous!" (Josh. 1:7; Judg. 6:14), but we shall have utterly the wrong idea if we conceive of a chosen people as a favored nation, destined to be preserved from tumult, frustration, persecution, attack, and apparent disaster. Indeed, the contrary is likely to be true. "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matt. 5:11), for when these things happen to us we have reason to believe that we are in the true line of the Chosen People. It is when all men speak well of us that we need to be afraid.

Our Lord never hid from his disciples that this was likely to be the mark of his people; it could not be otherwise, for they had done the same to him. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). We must therefore question whether the present popularity of the Christian Church in the United States is not a very dangerous sign. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Church here today enjoys a very good press and it stands high in the esteem of the people; every year its membership increases and, whatever else may be true of it, it is certainly neither reviled nor persecuted. Naturally, we should be foolish if we did not give thanks for this, for it cannot but be our continual request that "thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness."\* It is not for one moment suggested that we should seek martyrdom by deliberately creating trouble, for the kind of foolish pride which demands to be allowed to suffer is as much to be condemned as any other form of pride. As the People of God we exist only that God may be seen and glorified, and it is not within our prerogative to decide by what means he shall be made known.

Nevertheless, when all is said, the disturbing thought re-

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\* *Book of Common Prayer*, Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity.



mains that we may only too easily think that the present well-being and popularity of the Church is a sign of God's favor, conferred upon us because we have so faithfully served him, and we may, if we are not careful, be tempted to think disparagingly of those struggling churches in Europe, which have lost their once numerous congregations and now have the greatest battle to make both ends meet. "Why are the churches over there so dead?" is the question which returning tourists so often ask when they consider the contrast with the flourishing churches of their own country. Now, no one who knows the European churches would deny that sloth and pride and human sin have done very much to mar them, but their weakness is not really our concern. What we have to ask ourselves is whether in this country we are not in even greater danger, the danger of not seeing that we have any weakness at all. "I said in my prosperity, 'I shall never be moved.' By thy favor, O Lord, thou hadst established me as a strong mountain," so said the psalmist, but immediately he was forced to continue, "Thou didst hide thy face, I was dismayed" (Ps. 30:6-7).

#### • WHAT CHOSEN PEOPLE MUST DO

The Chosen People must so live that God may be seen, and since the God who is to be seen through them is a God who by the creation has denied himself and limited his limitlessness, so it follows that the Chosen People must deny themselves also. This does not mean merely that the individual members of that people must be ready to give themselves to the uttermost, though, heaven knows, that is hard enough, but that the whole group must be prepared, if necessary, to deny its character as the People of God. This is a hard saying, but a true one, for it seems to be required of the People of God in the Bible that they should risk their very being and do the kind of thing which would apparently make it impos-

sible for them to continue to function as God's People. This is what was counted to Abraham for righteousness, that he should be ready, if need be, to sacrifice the very thing which was going to make possible the continuance of the People of God—his son Isaac. Isaac represented at that time all the numberless People of God, as the sand which is by the sea-shore for multitude. They were as yet unborn and, if Isaac were to die, it would seem that they never could be born, and therefore it was in this that Abraham's righteousness consisted, that he was prepared to let Isaac die and thus destroy his own character as the father of the People of God.

The People of God are called upon to deny themselves in another way also. They are required to deny all their wishes and hopes as a human institution. It is not only that the Church must seek no power or glory or credit, and must even reject all praise and honor and reputation, as being fitly given only to the Master whom she serves. It is also that she must, deliberately and of set purpose, lay herself open to receive the power of God. She must admit that she has no power of her own and to this end it is often necessary that she have no appearance of power, for just as Gideon could not be allowed more than three hundred men, and just as ancient Israel could never be allowed to be a powerful nation, so political power and wealth are a positive danger to the Church. She has to be content to be merely the channel through which the power of God acts.

Yet to be open unresisting to the power of God is to be exposed to we know not what. Perhaps you have seen a hose-pipe, carrying water under great pressure and writhing like a snake in agony—so it is with God's people, for when the power of God throbs through them, they are galvanized and transformed, and the strain may be almost more than they can bear. It is idle to pretend that the presence of God within a people does not set up strains and stresses which test them

at every joint and crack. "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword," said Jesus (Matt. 10:34). Tension and argument are the result of his coming, father set against son, and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law. This is inevitable, for when God is making himself known through a people, he is constantly making new demands upon them, challenging them to live according to higher and higher standards, exposing activities which are not yet up to these standards.

### • AREAS OF TENSION

Such challenges set up tensions in three areas: with the outside world, within the community, and within the individual. The outside world, of course, does not accept these standards and does not see the reason for them, and so it is likely to feel rebuked and made uncomfortable by the comparison between its own way of life and that which God is making known through his Church. In course of time, it is true, the worldly may come to accept these new standards and then they will wonder why they ever resisted them. In fact, they may even go so far as to say that the new behavior is "natural" and will deny flatly that it was the People of God who provoked them into it. So it has been with the abolition of slavery, the present standards of working conditions in factories, universal education—all of these are now considered "normal" and we have forgotten that each one of them has come to pass only because of the challenge which Christians, acting as Christians who were themselves challenged by their understanding of God's Word, made upon the conscience of their fellowmen. We accept these things as normal now, but we forget the struggles which accompanied each of these reforms, the resistance of vested interests, the violent opposition and the unworthy accusations of self-seeking made against the men who fought for them. But we should not forget these things, because if God is going to use us as in the

past he used the men who waged these battles, the same strain and tensions will be the lot of the Church again.

Yet it is not only with the outside world that the tensions develop. There are always many people within the fellowship of the Church itself, honest and sincere persons, who cannot see that God is making these demands. Thus, there were many who firmly believed that slavery was according to the will of God and they thought that it was impious and un-Christian to attack it. So also devout people in the early nineteenth century believed that poverty and distress were the lot of the factory workers by God's especial providence in order that by their distress others might be provoked to charity. And so we see that each reform of this kind is opposed, not only by those who for selfish and wilful reasons wish to maintain the *status quo*, but by thousands of good, Christian people to whom the vision has not yet come. Unable to believe that the reformers are really acting by the Spirit of God, they are bound to deplore the tensions and divisions which these reformers are causing within the Christian fellowship and to try to restrain them.

These tensions and divisions are indeed an unhappy thing. Even the reformers themselves, on fire with zeal for the cause to which they have given their lives, must, if they have any sensitiveness at all, be grieved and troubled at the manner in which they are wounding those who are dear to them. It is both natural and proper that they should ask themselves again and again whether in fact they are doing the right thing, or whether it would not be better to keep silent and avoid both the attacks which are made against them personally and the unhappiness which they are bringing upon their friends. There must be very few of those whom God has called who do not say from time to time, with Jeremiah, "Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land!" (Jer. 15:10) and yet with



Jeremiah also they feel a fire in their bones which will not let them be silent, which drives them to say even those very things which they most dread saying because of the unhappiness and tension they will cause.

### • THE CHOSEN NATION

There is, however, at least one area of life in which the Church cannot be the Chosen People, for she is apparently never chosen by God to wield political power. That must be entrusted to the State, and very often to one state in particular. It is true that all governments exercise some political power, even though their influence and authority may be restricted to their own borders, but there always seems to be one nation which is endowed with overwhelming power, to be exercised for a season and then, apparently, to be passed on in the course of history to another nation. In the past such nations have been Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, France, and Britain, but today it is the United States which finds itself in this position, and no Christian, conscious of what God is really like, can conceive of this power as being anything else than a trust for which the American people are answerable to God himself.

If we look back at the nation which held the overwhelming power before the United States, that is, Great Britain, we must surely be struck by the change which came over British opinion in the course of the nineteenth century, by the growth of an overweening pride which was not there at the end of the Napoleonic wars, and by the loss of her pre-eminent position which Great Britain suffered when this change occurred. In this sense, it is surely true to speak of the United States today as a "chosen people," appointed by God for the exercise of power and political influence, for while it is true that no national group can be *the* Chosen People, since that is the position of the Christian Church,

yet a nation can be a chosen people, chosen, that is, by God for this especial purpose of the exercise in his name of great political power. This has to be so because the Church as such cannot attempt to wield political power on behalf of, or instead of, the State—that would be to aspire to a position which by her very nature as a Church she cannot have—but no more can she withdraw her garments and pretend that for this reason she has no responsibility in the matter. She is surely called upon to do two things, (1) constantly to witness to the State that a chosen people can fulfil their position as God's people only by being ready to deny themselves, and (2) regularly to call upon Christian men and women to realize that God has a need of them in politics and government.

For a nation to deny itself would not seem to require that they should refuse to accept the power and responsibility, since once God lays a charge upon people it becomes, as we have seen, wrong and cowardly for them to refuse it and to say, "Send someone else instead of me." Isolationism, therefore, is ruled out of court as a Christian philosophy. Nevertheless, the nation is required to be prepared to risk the loss of this power and responsibility, for it is a trust to be exercised and not a treasure to be preserved at all costs. Consequently, the nation must realize that it is impossible for them to be right when they do things for the reason of prestige. This can be seen in Cyprus, where it is difficult to decide what is the proper solution, since the rights and wrongs of the situation are very complex, but where one thing is clearly improper—that Britain should seek to remain for reasons of prestige. It may be that there are valid strategic and political arguments why Cyprus at this time should be under the control of a strong power, but the prestige of Great Britain is not one of them. Similarly, the conception of *la gloire* which animates some of France's foreign policy must be condemned, not only as a non-Christian conception, but

also as a political goal which cannot possibly bring the desired results, in North Africa or anywhere else. It is only by being ready to lose their glory and prestige that a nation is glorified, because only then do they mirror the character of the God who has entrusted them with this power and wealth and position. That this is a reality and not merely some idealistic fancy of the theologian is hinted, to say the very least, by the present popularity of Great Britain in India, where she has certainly gained more glory by going than she would ever have had, if she had remained for reasons of "prestige" as there were some who wanted her to do.

Naturally, it cannot be expected of a nation that they will have the understanding of the Way of the Cross which should characterize the Christian Church. Indeed they will not have it at all if there is not proceeding from the Church a constant supply of Christians ready to work patiently in government service, each in his own sphere struggling to work out what it means to be a Christian in that sphere, for the organized churches as such cannot dabble in politics. It is questionable even whether they should be as ready as they often are to send telegrams of advice to the government on the Middle Eastern question, or North Africa, or the Formosa crisis, or anything else in the international realm, for it is always possible, and at times probable, that because they are not directly involved, their pious resolutions will do more harm than good. What they must do is to see that the Christian voice is heard because there are Christians doing the job, in all the morass of compromise and double-talk which modern politics involves. It is by this that the Christian Church can be a watchman to the nation, by this and by forever making known the principles by which God works and, not least perhaps, by letting it be clear what happens to a "chosen people" when they do not fulfil God's purposes.

## GOD'S STRANGE WORK

REVELATION 3:1-6    MATTHEW 5:13-16

HOSEA 2:2-15    1 SAMUEL 4:1-10

ISAIAH 10:5-15; 22:1-14; 28:14-22

JEREMIAH 7:1-15

• SO FAR IT IS CLEAR that God must, and does, reveal himself to a people, and through them to the whole world, and yet it is always possible for that people to fail to act as the channel through which this is done. Because a group of men have been chosen—or appointed—to receive the revelation of God does not for one moment take away from them their free will, the apparently inalienable right of men and women to decide for themselves what they shall do. In becoming the People of God, therefore, they do not become automatons, and it is always possible for them to refuse to perform God's purposes or to fail in doing so.

Indeed, history would suggest that, since men are what they are, groups of men have always, sooner or later, failed in this high purpose, and that they have never been able to maintain the standard required of those whose calling is so to live that in their words and actions men may see God. This has happened in the past and it is always possible for it to happen again, and if it should happen, the Bible makes it very clear what the result will be. Christ himself has left us in no doubt at all that a people who have failed in their essential function, have failed, that is, to do the job God has



given them to do, are as useless as salt which is not salty and which therefore is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trodden under the foot of men (Matt. 5:13). Consequently, we must never assume, because we bear the name of Christian, that we shall not discover God's opinion of us to be that we are a good-for-nothing lot, and that we shall not hear the dreaded judgment, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evil-doers" (Matt. 7:23). It is possible both for a church and for a nation to die, and this is apparent equally from the message of God to the church at Sardis, "You have the name of being alive, and you are dead" (Rev. 3:1), and from history. In North Africa, for instance, there was once a great and flourishing church which produced in its day such outstanding men as St. Augustine and Tertullian, but there is not even a trace of it now in the whole vast area, and in Asia also the dynamic missionary effort of the Nestorians is only a memory today. As for nations, the earth is littered with the remains of their nobility, sometimes in places where in our day desert or jungle reign supreme.

Nothing, it would seem, is so sacred that the possession of it can ever protect a group or nation from the stern judgment which Christ passed upon the Jewish people of his time, "I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43). Twice in the course of their long history the Jews had this lesson firmly impressed upon them. The first occasion was right back in the days of Eli when the Israelites were worsted at the hands of the Philistines and they said, "Why has the Lord put us to rout today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies" (1 Sam. 4:3), imagining that if the sacred ark, the very dwelling-place, so to speak, of God himself, were in danger, then God could not allow it to be

taken. It is important that we grasp that at that time it was utterly inconceivable that God could properly be worshiped if the ark did not exist, for it was the very center and focal point of that worship. There was as yet no temple, and Jerusalem was still an independent city and destined not to pass under Jewish control for another sixty years or more. Nevertheless, the ark was captured and the center of worship of God at Shiloh was destroyed, never to hold that position again.

This utter destruction of Shiloh, "where I made my name dwell at first," was used some three hundred and fifty years later as an illustration by the prophet Jeremiah when the Jews were guilty once again of the same error, imagining that God could not—for his honor—allow Jerusalem to be destroyed (Jer. 7:1-15). In those days Jerusalem had become the only place where sacrifices were offered, the place to which every Jewish male had to make a pilgrimage three times a year. Only a tiny section of the once more extensive country remained where God was still worshiped, the rest having long since been corrupted by the Assyrian conquest and the ruthless exchange of populations which the conquerors had imposed. Within that tiny section King Josiah had recently instituted reforms, as a result of which it was insisted that the full worship could be performed only at the Temple at Jerusalem, where it could be properly supervised and kept pure.

In order to understand the full force of Jeremiah's pungent sermon in front of the Temple gate, it is necessary to understand the force of the popular argument. For them the thought of opening the gates at Jerusalem, the city of their solemnities, to the pagan Chaldeans could be nothing else than rank treachery and real disloyalty to their God, for the more that they were told that the Lord alone was God (though according to Jeremiah many of them did not believe

this) and that all other worship was false and deceptive, the more it must appear true that at least some place in all the world must be left where men bore witness to his existence. At least one temple must be maintained without an idol where God's name was held aloft before men. Just because the worship at Jerusalem was the only true worship, the only reality, so it could not be allowed to be snuffed out altogether. This was the argument which Jeremiah condemned as "deceptive words." It was deceptive because it led the people to believe that the Temple was in some sense a guarantee of God's favor, but a guarantee is exactly what a chosen people cannot be allowed to have. At no point can they be permitted to say, "This is our security; this is the guarantee that whatever disasters befall us we shall not be allowed to go under."

John the Baptist clearly warned the people of his time that they could not claim their descent from Abraham was a guarantee of security, for "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt. 3:9), and in saying this he was in the true prophetic tradition. God is concerned with righteousness and justice before all things, and any supposed bulwark which has been erected between the people and imminent disaster, encouraging them to assume that behind this bulwark they are freed from the necessity of further effort, has to be swept away. The kind of thinking which develops under the protection of such a security is that which we came to know in the period between the wars as the "Maginot mentality," the slothful resistance to effort and reform which characterized the French people of the thirties, confident that the impregnable strength of the Maginot line shielded them from invasion. When such thinking takes hold of a people or a nation, then the supposed security which encouraged its development must be smashed and disaster must come upon them with the utter inevitability of the succession of day by night. There is no other conceivable way

in which the essential fact of the universe can be brought home to them, the fact that it, and they with it, have been made and are sustained by a righteous Power; they partake of his nature and can flourish only when they conform to the character of their Maker. They have to be convinced—for their own ultimate good—that security resides in righteousness and justice, in that only and in nothing else at all. “If you truly amend your ways and your doings . . . I will let you dwell in this place,” says the Lord (Jer. 7:5-7), but if not, then there is no possible alternative—you must go!

### • MERCY SHOWN THROUGH JUDGMENT

“For their own ultimate good”—these are the operative words. We make a very great mistake if we imagine that the disaster which comes upon a complacent or a slothful people is executed by a wrathful and incensed potentate as a vindication of his honor. It is true that there are passages in the Old Testament which, if taken alone, might tend to suggest this, but no one part of the Bible must ever be considered except in relation to the whole, and by now it should be evident that the God who is revealed in the pages of the Bible does not care one iota for his honor; he is of his very nature self-denying. What he cares for is his people, his creation. In the modern technical jargon, therefore, the punishment is essentially remedial.

This is worked out in a passage of singular beauty by the prophet Hosea (Hos. 2:2-15), where he argues that the people of Israel must have one path after another blocked by thorns, so that they are cut off from every one of their supposed sources of well-being and security. Only one path is to be left open, the path into the desert, and along that path they are to be driven, every treasure left behind them, until as naked captives they face the truth and say, “It was better with me then than it is now.” Then, of course, was when



they based their security upon a life of righteousness and not upon wealth or military might or any of the gods of the heathen. When this point is reached, when this fact is faced, it becomes possible for the true purpose of the captivity to be seen: it is in order that God may speak tenderly to them and turn the valley of trouble (*Achor*—v. 15) into a door of hope.

It is when the prodigal son "comes to himself," and only then, that his father can run to meet him on his return, but it seems to be true that most people do not come to themselves until they are in despair. It is not that God's mercy is ever set aside or forgotten, but that there are times when this mercy can be made apparent only in judgment. Naturally, if men were to seek the authority of God and his righteousness at any point before that of ultimate despair, then their well-being would result just as surely. It is not that God wants people to despair before he will help them, for, as Ezekiel protests so passionately, God does not enjoy himself when a wicked person dies (*Ezek. 33:10*). It is rather that most people do not ever face facts until they are in despair. What is truly remarkable is that God is seemingly so careless of his "honor" that he is prepared to accept man's worship, even when it is offered as a last resort.

What must not be forgotten, however, with every reminder that the property of God is always to have mercy, is that disaster remains disaster. Strife, invasion, rebellion, massacres, and reprisals are never anything else but a sordid and bloody business. The endless pilgrimage of refugees is not a dignified procession, but a hopeless, wearisome, disease-ridden trek which leaves many victims along its path. These hideous brutalities of war, the stench, corruption, and unnecessary miseries, are reflected time and again in the pages of the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New. Wherever a people have grown complacent or careless of jus-

tice behind an imagined protection, the destruction of that protection will involve them in suffering and distress, both real and prolonged. This is not just a "Bible story"—it is a fact of history.

### • SECURITY AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

What in this vast American continent we find so very difficult to realize is that "security," which Anglo-Saxons are inclined to consider as their birthright, is not the normal heritage of the People of God, and that the whole prophetic message was delivered to a nation whose position was most evidently insecure. Palestine is a tiny country, no larger than the state of Vermont, and after the conquest of Samaria by the Assyrians the Kingdom of Judah that remained was tinier still. It is possible to set out from Jerusalem after lunch, and, in the course of an afternoon's walk, reach the edge of the kingdom and return to the capital in time for supper. If a man of Isaiah's day had taken that walk, he would have been able to stand on the edge of the Judaeian hills and see below him the smoke rising from the pillaged homesteads which the Assyrian army had destroyed, and he could have returned to the city before they closed the gates at nightfall. It was in a country as helpless as this that Isaiah for fifty years proclaimed that the essential security is righteousness, and that treaties and military defense are an illusion. "Behold I am laying in Zion a foundation. . . . I will make justice the line and righteousness the plummet" (Isa. 28:16, 17a), for that is to be the test of whether the building is securely built or no. He maintained that it was useless for the government to claim that the danger had receded because they had made a treaty with Assyria, or because they had arranged for Egypt to come to their help in the event of an invasion, saying, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement." They might retire to their

beds with the comfortable assurance that by their political manoeuvres they had made it possible for men to sleep quietly at night, but they could not really be at ease, "for the bed is too short to stretch oneself on it, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in it" (Isa. 28:15, 20).

Should God's people persist in disregarding his revelation of himself as a God of righteousness, justice, and mercy, and in failing to change their own way accordingly, then the inevitable processes of judgment must come into action. God's word cannot return to him ineffective and useless, having done nothing. God is not only active power, but *effective* power. If the revelation does not achieve God's purpose directly, then the purpose must be achieved indirectly. This is what Isaiah terms God's "strange work" (Isa. 28:21), the teaching of the Chosen People "by men of strange lips and with an alien tongue" (Isa. 28:11), because they have refused to profit by the lesson when it was spelled out to them in the simple words of their own native language, which they had known from their childhood. This is the meaning of "line upon line" and "precept upon precept." These words in Hebrew are repetitive monosyllables (*qav, qav, tsav, tsav*), practically "baby-talk," but Isaiah warns his inattentive hearers that "it will be sheer terror to understand the message" when it is from foreign teachers that they have to learn it (Isa. 28:19).

It is not in what are commonly called "acts of God," earthquakes, tempests, and the fury of the elements, that the judgment is expressed. Such convulsions are reminders of the power of God, it is true, but hardly of his wrath, for according to the prophetic thinking, they are not the inevitable judgment, which is expressed rather in day-to-day events, that is to say in history, for it is primarily through men that God teaches men. If God's own people fail to understand, to pursue and to proclaim the fundamental and primary ne-

cessity of righteousness, then another people must be charged with the task of teaching them by the dread methods of invasion and of war. Such a people are "the rod of God's anger," a title bestowed by Isaiah upon the king of Assyria (Isa. 10:5). It would be almost impossible to exaggerate the fear with which the Assyrian advance was regarded by the Jews as it moved towards their tiny mountain stronghold with the relentless insistence of a steadily rising flood ("the overwhelming scourge" as Isaiah called it), and each decade saw the army closer to Jerusalem. 743 B.C. was the year of Tiglath Pileser's accession to the throne and the beginning of the Assyrian conquests. In 732 they took Damascus; in 722 Samaria; in 711 the Philistine territory, and in 701 they made the long awaited attack on Jerusalem. They were a bitterly cruel people, possibly the world's first militarists, and were destined in their own turn to suffer for their pride and cruelty, as Isaiah indeed saw, but not until the People of God had learned their lesson first, and Judaea had been laid waste, only Jerusalem being left, miraculously and incredibly preserved, "like a lodge in a cucumber field" (Isa. 1:8), just a solitary shanty in a vegetable patch.

This is the biblical view of the processes by which God's mercy is expressed through wrath and judgment, and through all the tumult of a world in revolution, "strange work" indeed for a merciful and loving Father, and yet a terrible necessity if righteousness and justice are not to be a mockery. Nor is this an Old Testament conception which is abrogated in the New, for no little space in the Gospels is given to our Lord's warnings of what must happen in Palestine if the people persisted in the folly of their ways. We are perhaps inclined to forget how much of Christ's teaching is concerned with the certainty and necessity of God's wrath and judgment upon the children of disobedience.



### • WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

The question therefore arises: If this interpretation has some measure of truth, what does it mean for us? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this country is in some sense a "chosen" country, or, if that adjective is unpalatable, a "destined" country, charged by God with a special responsibility, and endowed by him for the purpose with wealth, power, position, and prestige. Within the country the Christian Church is certainly a Chosen People, part of the People of God throughout the world to whom he has entrusted the special revelation of his nature made in Jesus Christ. It is perhaps necessary to make clear that we are discussing the American responsibility only because this book is being written in America for Americans. It is not pretended that other countries, such as Britain, France, India, Pakistan, Switzerland, and so on, have not their responsibilities also in the sight of God. Nevertheless, the gigantic power and wealth of the United States at this present time inevitably places her in a special position, and that her people hold her to be in some measure under the protection and favor of God, however moderately this is construed, is evidenced by the recent addition to the oath of allegiance of the words, "This nation under God." What the Christian Church has to do is to remind the nation that, if this phrase "under God" is based upon Biblical teaching, it can mean nothing less than "under the judgment of God," and that *the more this nation is thought to be a chosen people, the more this is true*. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). This is the proper relationship of the Chosen People within a chosen people, of the Church within a nation which has been charged with special responsibilities, to act as a watchman, to remind the nation of the fundamental principles by which it exists and possesses power, and to attempt to in-

interpret the processes of God's activity both in the nation and in the world.

Now this nation, in company with all the rest of the Western world, of which she is the acknowledged leader, finds herself at the present time in an uneasy balance of power with the Eastern or Communist world. The barrier between them is very roughly the great mountain belt which extends right across Europe and Asia, and within which the communist dominion is more or less confined. There are, it is true, alarming indications of communist activity on this side of the mountain wall, but in no case does her full authority extend there. The Western strategy, therefore, is to attempt to reinforce this natural defence by a ring of armed and interlocking alliances, such as SEATO, NATO, and the Baghdad Pact, so strongly defended that we shall always be able to negotiate with the Soviet from a position of strength.

It is exactly this position of strength which the Church must warn the nation is so dangerous, for it provides for the Western world what the "covenant with death" gave the people of Judah, a false feeling of security, a sense that we can relax behind the impassable barriers of nature and of man's contriving. Our tendency in the West is to believe that our way of life is so superior that we are justified in straining every nerve to preserve it, and so we maintain to Russia and the world that all we want to do is to be allowed to continue peacefully to live as we are living. But, at the risk of being called treacherous, the Church has to proclaim that we must not hope to continue to live as we are living, and she should insist that every security other than that of a righteous life is illusory. It is not that positions of strength and covenants, treaties and alliances are in themselves evil, but that they are *temporary*. The Church must ever make it clear that we are merely buying time and that with every year that passes this time is more expensive. It is worth buy-

ing if we know what it is for, it is "time for amendment of life." We are never justified in preserving our manner of living; we are justified only in reforming it.

It is in this sense surely that we must understand the menace of communism as the rod of God's anger, his mercy expressed in judgment. It would be idle to pretend that for the Western world to pass under Communist domination would be anything but distress and misery for mankind. If there were no other reason for feeling that we must continue to support the West against the East, it is that no one runs away from America because he is afraid of it, while hundreds every month make their escape from behind the iron curtain. Nevertheless, it is also true that whenever the threat from Russia is lessened, as it seemed to be at the "meeting at the summit" in the summer of 1955, our consciences are lulled and there is, for instance, felt to be less necessity of unity in Western Europe, but when we are reminded that the danger still exists, as when Czechoslovakia sends arms to the Middle East, we are shocked into action and people in America are found urging that the foreign aid program should be increased. Were we to wake up one morning and find that by some miracle the danger had completely disappeared, would there not once more be voices to demand that American money should be spent only at home, and would not the European nations again resume their squabbling?

What happens to a people when the fear of disaster is taken suddenly away from them is shown in one of the grimmest passages in the whole Bible, the so-called "oracle concerning the valley of vision" (Isa. 22:1-14), which reveals also what the judgment upon them must be. This passage dates from very nearly the end of Isaiah's long life of teaching and prophecy. For rather over forty years he had been maintaining that Jerusalem would not be taken by the As-

syrians and that, though they might plunder and destroy all the country round about, this one city would be left "like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill" (Isa. 30:17). He never pretended that it would not be a time of great misery and fear, but he kept on saying that by the direct action of God the danger would be removed, so that quite suddenly it would be nothing but a memory, a bad dream from which they had awaked (Isa. 29:1-8). In 701 B.C. this happened. The Assyrians attacked Jerusalem and for a while their army sat grimly around the terrified city, waiting only until it should have become weak enough to capture. An Assyrian inscription of the period rightly says that they shut up King Hezekiah of Judah "like a bird in a cage." Then, all of a sudden, they disappeared. Apparently, the army had been so wasted by disease during the period of waiting that they had decided to call off the siege. Naturally, the people of Jerusalem went wild with relief and it was in the middle of their hysterical rejoicing that Isaiah delivered this message.

He reminded them of how frightened they had been and of what good reason they had had for the fear (vv. 5-11a); he pointed out that it was not they who had killed the Assyrians (vv. 2-3) and asked what, therefore, they were doing, shouting for joy on the housetops. This was the vindication of everything that he had ever told them about God's dealings with his people and yet they did not give that side of the matter a moment's thought; instead of showing any sign of repentance, of planning to do better in the future, they had given themselves over entirely to feasting, as if tomorrow and the future did not matter (vv. 11b-13). There was only one thing left which he could tell them and so he said, in what is possibly the most terrible verse in Scripture (v. 14), "The Lord of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: 'Surely, this iniquity will not be forgiven you till you die.'"



No other message is possible to a people who will not learn, for they cannot be given endless chances, if righteousness is to mean anything at all. Therefore, Christians must say to their nation that it is not by pacts and alliances that wars are postponed and, if all we want to do is to preserve our way of life, then at the risk of losing every member she has got, the Church must teach that a third world war is not only inevitable—it is a necessity.

## CHALLENGE BY THE TRUTH

GENESIS 1:1-2:3 PSALM 19

ISAIAH 29:8-14 JOHN 1:1-18; 3:1-12; 16:7-13

• SO FAR IN OUR INQUIRY we have been considering the Church and the nation as “chosen people,” because they are the two groups to which all Christians must belong. However, there is the smaller and more specialized group of the college or university to which we belong as students or teachers, and we must now take some time to consider how far this “community of learning,” of which every college is a part, has to be regarded as a chosen people endowed by God with a special and necessary responsibility. The word “necessary” here is important, because we are not talking about ordinary responsibilities. It is certainly true that any group, which has a job to do, such as a business, a scout troop, a rotary club, and so on, has responsibilities and it cannot shirk them without incurring censure and blame, but it is not that kind of responsibility which we are discussing. A “necessary” responsibility as used here means a function which belongs to the very nature of God himself and which, in his creation, he performs through men. We have already seen that it is easy enough to consider the Church as *the Chosen People*, but we went on to discover that the nation also must be thought of as a chosen people, since the maintenance of order and justice, that is the wielding of political power, cannot be committed to the Church.

Whenever the Church has usurped this power, as she did at certain periods during the Middle Ages, then she has been corrupted by it. Consequently, there must be some body other than the Church which performs this divine function and which has this necessary responsibility. Must we say the same of the university?

I wrote just now of the university as part of the "community of learning" and this is the second important consideration. The community of learning is that vast body of people who are in any way engaged in study, which extends from the kindergarten to the end of the post-graduate course. To be a member of this community is part of the heritage of every American citizen, just as it is part of the heritage of the citizens of most Western countries, though it is not every citizen who enjoys the benefits of membership for the whole of the period, and only a few continue to be active members after they have graduated. The university, therefore, is different only in degree from the high schools and public schools of the country, of which it should consider itself the continuation and fulfilment, but far too often the members of a university, whether faculty or students, tend to imagine that they have put the things of their schooldays behind them, and that now they breathe a more rarefied air. This is not true and we must not make the same mistake. Yet it is true that in the university we see the community of learning at its most complete, and the question now is whether we are to consider this community as being, in any true sense of the word, a chosen people.

Before we try to answer this question we must take note of three important historical facts:

(1) The community of learning is not necessarily the same as the community of faith. We can see this if we examine three of the world's outstanding cultures, the culture of the

West today, the Classical culture, and the Chinese. Today, of course, the greater part of Western education is carried on as an activity of the State, and in this country the separation of Church and State has meant that very nearly the whole of primary and secondary education is secular. The greater number of universities and colleges also are secular institutions. In the days of Greece and Rome also education was not specifically religious, and yet it reached such heights that what was taught to the students then is still worthy of our consideration today. Certainly, it was not so entirely secular as some of the modern education, but it was not necessarily conducted by religious institutions as such. Likewise, in China, where the scholar was accorded an esteem for which he has vainly longed elsewhere, the giving and getting of knowledge was not held to be an essentially religious activity.

(2) Nevertheless, the religious communities have often thought of education as really part of their job. When we consider the monastic education of medieval Europe, the "madrassahs" of Islam, the Talmudic schools and teaching of the scribes among the Jews, and the amazingly high standard of literacy in Burma, which is the result of the education given in the Buddhist monasteries, it should be obvious that religious communities as such have often done a tremendous amount to maintain and develop learning. This is partly because those religions which are based upon revelation, and which have as part of their heritage holy books, need a constant supply of people who can both read and interpret these books, if the religion is to continue. However, it goes deeper than that, because all these four groups which we have mentioned, the Christian and the Buddhist monasteries, the Jewish rabbis and *sopherim*, and the Muslim *madrassahs* have been ready to teach, not only those who wanted to become priests and scribes, but also those who made it clear from the



beginning that they would go back to their ordinary jobs. Apparently it was felt that teaching, the imparting of knowledge, was itself a religious activity, and so it was fitting that it should be performed by holy men.

(3) And yet this activity has tended to remain merely "religious education" in every religious community except the Christian ones. We have to admit that the teaching given in these religious institutions has, more often than not, been very narrow. Of course, it would be stupid to despise it for that reason, because it has kept learning alive when otherwise it might well have perished. Nevertheless, it has tended again and again to concentrate upon the reading and study of the holy books alone, and this by itself has been felt to be a sufficient occupation. What may be called pure learning, that is, the acquiring of knowledge for the sake of knowing, regardless of whether the knowledge had a religious significance, has seldom found a place and was often frowned upon in religious institutions, because it was felt to be either unnecessary or frivolous. To this rule there have been some exceptions, such as the Muslim universities of Spain, but the really great exception has been that of the Christian schools, though it is certainly true that a vast amount of education given in Christian religious institutions, even to this day, has remained very narrow. For instance, what was taught in the medieval monasteries was mainly of this limited "religious" nature, and in Africa and Asia the missionary schools were started originally with the idea of teaching people to read in order that they might read the Bible.

Nevertheless, the important point about Christian religious institutions is that their education has not stopped there. It is a simple fact of history that only the Christian religious groups have been ready to go out to countries other than their own, and to start schools and universities where

all subjects were taught. They did this because they felt it needed doing, and they saw no kind of incongruity in continuing this work in the name of the Christian Church, and in appealing publicly for funds from other Christian groups that they might continue their work, even when *there were large areas where the majority of the people attending these schools remained obstinately outside the Christian Church.* It is also a fact of history that only within Christian institutions has it proved possible to combine *unaltered* the deep, spiritual, religious life of the community, as it was practiced long before the development of modern learning, with the modern learning itself.

From these considerations, therefore, we must conclude that (1) the community of learning exists in its own right, but (2) it is essentially allied to the community of faith, and (3) it is, nevertheless, only within the Christian faith that the two groups can really form one community, and yet each maintain its own identity and integrity. This is the kind of paradox to which the Christian is quite accustomed, for he has been taught from the very beginning that God is entirely merciful and yet entirely just, that he is 'Three Persons and yet only one God, that Christ is perfect man and yet at the same time perfect God. He knows himself to be a sinner and yet to be redeemed. Husband and wife are for him (to use Christ's words) "one flesh" and yet they are obviously separate people. His whole conception of truth is of this character, that the deepest and most fundamental truths have always this curious quality of being both different and the same. Consequently, a community which is at one and the same time a community of learning and a community of faith, and yet in which neither loses its own identity and integrity, is—or should be—just another illustration of what he has known and believed all along.

### • RELIGION AND LEARNING

What has happened today, therefore, that the centers of learning and the centers of religion are so often kept separate, that men should have founded secular colleges, which are suspicious of any church activity on their campuses, and that the academic world should have grave doubt about the Jesuits and Dominicans, fearing that, despite their undoubted erudition, priests cannot ever really be intellectually free? If you have got as far as this, you are probably by now muttering to yourself, "Yes, yes, of course, science and religion!" and you may already be beginning to think darkly about the crass obscurantism of those who believe that the world was made in seven days or that Jonah was swallowed by a whale, or if you are of the other persuasion, of the deplorable atheism of those who do not believe these things. However, I want to suggest that, though there is a clash between science and religion, it does not occur in the area in which most people think it does.

There has been a very curious confusion of thought about this whole issue. During the nineteenth century, when scientific inquiry was developing like a tempestuous flood, the devout feared that it was striking at the very roots of their faith, for theories of evolution appeared to them to be destroying the conception of man as a special creation and undermining the whole basis of trust which men had previously placed in the Bible as an infallible book. Worse than that, the application of scientific principles to Biblical criticism seemed to be leaving almost nothing that could be believed with any certainty. The very existence of Jesus himself at one time was questioned and, though that extreme position is today held by only a few, there is hardly a saying attributed to him which some scholar or another has not called "dubious." Since those days there has been a reaction, and among many people in the world today it is main-

tained that the whole question is settled. Both theologians and scientists are apt to reply a little irritably, "There is no real clash between science and religion; they are dealing with different areas of thought." Nevertheless, it is very revealing that there seems to be more joy in Christian circles over one atomic physicist who is outspokenly religious than over ninety and nine ordinary Christians who have no pretensions to scientific learning. Likewise, in the academic world there is often profound surprise over a clergyman who reveals himself as possessing serious scientific knowledge. The fact is that there is a clash, but it is no longer concerned with such questions as whether the Bible is literally true or not. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the essential clash ever concerned itself with that kind of question at all. It is far more probable that those questions were merely surface manifestations, like the waves of the sea, which may often be violent and spectacular, but which never have any real depth.

The whole scientific revolution which has been proceeding and developing during the modern period is certainly not of the Devil, as the devout fundamentalists believed, nor is it, as most people would probably argue today, merely neutral. Anyone with a sound Biblical foundation must believe it to be of God. One of the principles behind biblical thinking, which is only another way of saying, part of the revelation God has made about himself through the Bible, is that the whole universe was brought into being by the power of God and that it reflects the nature of him who made it, in that it is essentially good. When the priestly writer of the first chapter of Genesis took over the story of the creation of the world from Babylonian sources, he was concerned, not to correct it scientifically (which he was quite incapable of doing) but to interpret it. Seven times throughout the story he insists that God saw that what he was doing was good.



and this idea of a created universe which reflects the goodness of its Creator persists throughout the Bible. "I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established" (Ps. 8:3). "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). The parables which Jesus told show the same outlook, that even the simplest natural phenomena reveal something of the nature of God, just because they have all been made by God. Christianity itself is founded, not upon high spiritual teaching, but upon an event, upon something which happened at a certain point in history, irrevocably dated, "when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea," and which could therefore be made the subject of scientific inquiry.

It follows that those who accept this kind of religion can never think of history as being merely the story of past, and therefore dead, events, or of the facts of the universe as being common and material, beneath the notice of a saintly figure given to contemplation. Christians are bound to believe that all inquiry into the secrets of the universe must ultimately reflect the glory of the God who made the universe. What disturbed them so much in the nineteenth century was the fact that they were expecting a reflection and they got a revelation. They were expecting confirmation of the limited ideas they already held, but they were shocked by being presented with a conception so vast that it appeared almost as an entirely new thing. They thought that they knew the limits within which God works and because of that they tended to think, so to speak, that they had got the measure of God. This is not for one moment to deny that in Christ we have the complete revelation of God and that in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). Christ is *the* revelation of God—of that there is no question here—but there is a danger to man inherent in the very perfection

and completeness of God's revelation of himself in Christ. The more men contemplate the perfection of this revelation, the more they are tempted to think that they have comprehended it and to assume that therefore there can be no other kind of revelation. But God is power, infinite, absolute power, and it is intolerable that we should impose limits other than those which he chooses to impose upon himself. We have already seen that any boundaries and frontiers which men attempt to construct and behind which they take shelter and say, "Now we can do what we like," must be swept away utterly. Man, for his own ultimate good, cannot be allowed that kind of security. So it is with any other limits. God must not be constrained by man. "But, passing through the midst of them he went away" (Luke 4:30).

#### • A REVELATION OF GOD

In this sense the upsurge of the scientific revolution is a revelation of God, a revelation by God of himself, a pouring out of his spirit upon all flesh in power and great might, an unlocking of the secrets of his universe. We may object that the incredible size and wonder of it seems to leave no place for God, or suggests a God so far beyond all imagining that it is unthinkable that he should visit an insignificant people upon a tiny planet which is a mere speck in just one of the uncountable nebulae in space. But it is just this kind of God that the Bible has asked us to believe in all along, a God whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain and yet who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth (2 Chron. 2:6; Ps. 113:6, *Prayer Book* version). The Biblical writers always held that man had no significance of his own. "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (Ps. 8:4) is the kind of question which they ask.

However, if God chooses to take upon himself the nature

of man, then man is thereby endowed with dignity, even though he does not of his own nature possess it. The danger of God's doing this is always that man will imagine that the dignity which he has been given is really his own by right, and it is this idea which is utterly destroyed by scientific inquiry. However, no one in his senses ought ever to have believed that it was a biblical idea. What is nevertheless interesting is that the same people who claim that modern science has ousted man from the center of the universe and has made it impossible that God should take especial care of such a contemptible creature are perfectly ready to assume, and even at times to claim in so many words, that man is the master of nature and is daily learning ever more to bend it to his will. The truth is that it was never at any time the biblical idea that man is the center of the universe. The biblical writers were quite ready to believe that the earth was the center of the solar system, because there is no doubt that it does look like that to uninstructed eyes, but they never thought that it was by any virtue of man's nature that the earth had this position. For God to become man meant "emptying himself" (Phil. 2:7) and the results of scientific inquiry are a reminder by God to man of how immeasurable that emptying was.

But this is only part of the truth which is contained in the statement that the scientific revolution was the revelation of God. It is shown also by the nature of the men who are at the center of the revolution, the nature of the true scientists, their integrity, selflessness, humility, and patience. Make no mistake. I am not pretending that all scientists display these virtues. That would be silly. But they represent the ideal, the standard by which those who have received a modern scientific type of education are to be judged.

Of such men it is true to say that they cannot be until they have made these truths their own: "Behold, thou desirest

truth in the inward being" (Ps. 51:6); "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone" (John 12:24); "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression" (Ps. 19:13); "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom" (Matt. 18:3) and "Unless you repent you will . . . perish" (Luke 13:3). These sayings are truths no less of science than of religion.

Every educated man is called in this sense today to be a scientist. If the schoolboy, struggling with his books, or the college student at his lectures has learnt from them anything of the scientific attitude, then in his own sphere of work, he will respect these virtues and submit to their discipline—integrity, selflessness, humility, and patience.

Integrity is not merely honesty and uprightness. It is passionately and ruthlessly to search out and destroy the weaknesses in our own work in the spirit of the great Louis Pasteur, who used to tell his students, "Other people say to you, 'Prove that you are right!' I say, 'Try to prove that you are wrong.'" It is of the first importance that we admit not only the possibility that we are wrong, but also the certainty that in some things we must be.

Then they must be selfless, utterly and completely regardless of self, because wherever thoughts of private gain, personal prestige, self-justification, or vindication of one's own theories creep in through a crack in the door, then truth at once flies out of the window. Your true scientist is the man who will throw over every cherished hypothesis, every honor and even his own livelihood if he discovers one, just one, incontrovertible fact which disproves his most dearly held theories. Scientists, like any other men, must see visions and dream dreams, but if they are true to their vocation, they must watch, perhaps not unmoved, for that would be too



much to ask, but at any rate without lasting regrets, the crash of all their hopes.

Humility is not a popular virtue, but it should possibly be the most characteristic of a scientist, who is properly humble before his subject which he sees as immeasurably greater than himself. He should never attempt to dominate it and never attempt to dominate his students, for the mark of real research is that the newest graduate may contribute the key to a problem which has escaped the trained eyes of the professor.

Finally, there is the quality of penitence, the readiness to be converted, to change one's mind, to begin again. How much of scientific inquiry is a patient picking up of shattered pieces, a sad admission that one was wrong, and that one must face it. There are many, it is true, who fall short of this, who will not repent, who will not change their minds and who persecute those who think differently from them. But then there are many Christians who will not admit that they have sinned, and God's condemnation falls on scientist and Christian alike: Unless you repent, you will perish!

Enough has been said to show that the scientific attitude is of God. It belongs to the Christian world and moves in Christian spheres of thought. This is the most terrifying fact of education, that it lays these burdens upon men, for whether they like it or not, all the boys and girls who once come in contact with true education are required thereafter to be this kind of person and they are judged by God and their conscience if they fail.

#### • BEARING WITNESS TO TRUTH

Thus it is that we must consider the university, which is as it were the citadel of the community of learning, to be a chosen people. They are charged by God to be the channel through which he makes known the nature of truth itself. There is no essential clash between this task and that of the Church since

both bear witness to the truth. There is, of course, this difference that the university works rather in the sphere of discoverable truth, but even so there is considerable overlapping, for the Christian religion is a historical religion, basing its faith upon certain events in history, that is, within the area of discoverable truth, and the university also contains schools of the creative arts, such as music and literature, whose "truth" lies outside the widest limits of scientific inquiry. The essential quality of truth to which the whole scientific method bears especial witness is that what is true is irrevocable, unalterable, final, solid and firm. Men must be altered to fit it, for it can never be altered to fit the desires of men. It has the ruthless precision of a mathematical statement, such as that which says that two lines are parallel only when they are so drawn that they would never meet even if prolonged into infinity. Should they vary from that relationship "but in the estimation of a hair," they would meet ultimately and they are therefore not parallel. There is no third possibility.

Truth has also this quality, that once it is known it can never be unknown again. Once revealed, it is irremovable, and those who have come to know it must in future direct all their thoughts and actions in accordance with the truth they have learned. What could be forgiven in the past, cannot conceivably be forgiven in the future. This is what the scientist means when he says that no one must ever suppress a fact if it conflicts with a theory, for the fact, once discovered, forever sits in judgment on his theories. This is most clearly seen, of course, in the realm of pure science, and the discipline which this imposes on the scientist has helped to create the popular idea that a scientist is a cold and somewhat ruthless man, untouched by common human feelings. However, it is not the scientist who is ruthless, but his subject, that is, truth itself, and truth has got to be. It cannot be altered, for if it could, it would not be true.

What is true of scientific truth is also true of the arts. The writer, the musician, and the painter know that there is an inherent truth, a rocklike quality, in their material with which they cannot tamper. The author may begin a book with a fairly open mind about how it is to develop, but once begun the book exhibits a nature of its own which determines its development. Anyone who has done much writing knows that he may begin even something so short as an essay or a lecture, or it may be a book, either of fact or fiction, and find that before it has gone very far it is obvious that the whole beginning must be rewritten, for what could be forgiven in the past cannot be forgiven after the truth has been revealed. The central idea is so rocklike and ruthless that everything must be altered to fit it. If this were not done, the lecture or the book would no longer hang together—it would not “ring true.”

What is perhaps not so often realized is that this is a fundamental part of God's revelation of himself, and as such is discussed several times in the pages of the Bible. It is very interesting that in the first chapter of Genesis light is the first thing which is created and it is created four days before the sun, which is not brought into existence until after the earth has been covered with vegetation. Now, no one living in an agricultural society, such as that of ancient Israel, could possibly be unaware that it is because of the heat and light of the sun that plants grow, and so, on the surface, this would seem to be an amazing error. However, the writer apparently thought of light as having a reality and quality of its own, and this is the quality of God. Throughout the Bible light and truth go together (“Oh send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me”—Ps. 43:3) and they are the opposite of darkness, ignorance, and sin. When the writer described God as creating light as if he were creating something solid, which he divided from the darkness, he was not just being childish.

He was affirming in the best way that he could this central characteristic of light and truth. John says very much the same thing when he says that "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). The picture is that of a pencil of light, as it were the beam of a searchlight, piercing the gloom around it, and utterly resistant to any efforts to smother or deflect it. The light is so much to be identified with truth that as a matter of course "he who does what is true comes to the light" (John 3:21).

However, because the light and truth are of the same nature, the fact that the light has come is itself a judgment. What could be forgiven before the light came cannot be forgiven now that it is there, and this is one of the central paradoxes with which John is wrestling in his Gospel. Jesus, who personifies in the fullest sense the Light, for he was the Light coming into the world, has not come to judge the world; he has come that through him the world may be saved, and yet his very appearance judges the world, making unforgivable what could have been forgiven before. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin," said Jesus about the Jews (John 15:22), and the writer's comment is that "he who does not believe is condemned already" (John 3:18).

In the other Gospels this is expressed differently, but the meaning is the same, as when Jesus likens himself to the stone which the builders rejected, and says of it, "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one it will crush him" (Luke 20:18). Truth is inexorable. It can never be altered to fit people, and truth, once revealed, forever sits in judgment on those who have come to know it. We have the same thing dealt with by Isaiah, when he describes the Lord as both "a sanctuary, and a stone of offence . . . to both houses of Israel" (Isa. 8:14). This is the central problem also of all education. We often talk idly as if



education were necessarily a good thing, forgetting that every teacher who opens the eyes of his students to some part of the truth—and every teacher should—is bound to say to himself, if he is honest, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin.” The university is a chosen people charged with the task of keeping this clearly before our eyes.

### • THE NEGLECT OF TRUTH

It follows that the Church has no right to accuse the university, as she so often does, of placing too much emphasis on intellectual values and discoverable truth, because that is exactly what, in the providence of God, the university is there for. It is just in this field that God drives home most evidently the shattering lesson of the finality of truth, and the judgment which comes with every discovery or revelation, use which word you will. If “science” ceased to be “scientific,” the university would fail in this innermost and essential function. Rather, if the Church is to accuse her of anything, she must rebuke her because it is in this essential function that she is failing.

There is within the community of learning today a surprising neglect of truth, a forgetting that it has this oneness and this final inexorable quality. Learning has become departmentalized so that schools and colleges encourage what can only be called a “cash-box mind,” that attitude which keeps physics (like dollar-bills) in one section, religion (like quarters) in another, and history (like dimes) in a third, and *never lets them mix*. This has proceeded so far that there is often today very little real contact of mind between the student and the professor, for the latter concentrates on his subject, leaving the student’s personal life to another specialist, who is his counselor. We see this neglect of truth whenever the argument is made, as it often is in schools, that a pupil might be harmed psychologically if he were not promoted,

thus forgetting that the pupil must be fitted to the truth and never the truth be tailored to fit the pupil. We see it again in the "true or false" and "multiple choice" type of examinations, where "true" no longer really means "true" at all, but "what the books say." We see it in the attitude to sports, where the evil lies, not in the professionalism and the importance attached to winning or losing which is where this attitude is most usually assailed, but in its *isolationism*. Football may be an admirable sport, but the moment that you start working on the principle that you can make bigger and better footballers—as indeed you can—by isolating football, by developing specialists in football, by having the football teams back at college before the term begins and training them all day and every day to play what you call—God help us!—"scientific" football, you begin to sin against the truth. Man is not made in this kind of way so that one part of him can be developed and the others neglected and it is in the highest sense untrue to pretend that he is. It is no good quoting St. Paul's metaphors about athletes; the athletes that St. Paul knew would have frowned on such specialization. They would have called it "banausia" and thought it a very horrid thing.

Perhaps the most frightening thing about the community of learning today is that it does not think that there is anything frightening about it. How often does one speak to a teacher who seems to have no idea at all that he is doing anything serious and alarming to the students in his classes, who seems to think that all that he is doing is to help them along the difficult road of life, and who fails to grasp that with every advance that they make along that road there is an added weight of responsibility for them to carry, a burden for which they must one day render an account. They seem quite unaware that what they are saying all the time in effect is, "Prepare to meet your God!"

The Christian who has some claim to know both about

man and about truth ought to protest more often than he does over such things. Yet the university also should challenge the Church, for in the community of faith as well the truth is despised, for there is a shoddiness about much of the Church's work, a readiness to be content with the second-rate if it is felt to be morally uplifting. There is a kind of vice of Christian "charity" which hesitates to deal with poor workmanship, because it is felt to be unkind, and the result is an unenviable reputation when the Church's work is compared with professional standards. Thus professional social workers are critical about the standards of church-sponsored agencies; sermons are preached which would gain very low marks if presented as an essay by an ordinary high school student, and the clear truth of what Christ said about repentance, hell and judgment is smoothed over lest the congregation be disturbed. Missionary talks in particular are sometimes flatly dishonest and present the work that is being done in a manner which should make any man of integrity blush.

Perhaps the biggest thing that the university has to say to the Church is just that the scientific revolution has now taken place and that, therefore, what could have been forgiven in the past cannot be forgiven now. Thus, congregations of men and women who have been taught to read and to think, must be instructed in the Bible, must be brought face to face with what it really says, and there cannot be forgiveness for the parishes where this is not done. It is no longer permissible to bring the faithful up on what people say about the Bible. The scientific revolution demands that they be brought face to face with the statements upon which these opinions are based and be allowed to think for themselves. Yet, of how many congregations in this country today can it be said that they know for themselves what Jesus did, what he said, and what the Gospels actually say about him?

Finally, the university has a right to say to the Church,

"You say that truth is one and that man is one; you say that truth is inexorable and cannot be altered to fit our tastes, but what of your divisions: Do they reflect the truth? Is it in them that men see God?"

This is one of the more troubling questions that men of learning can ask the community of faith today and it is to this question that we must now turn. Is the Christian Church at this present time true to its own nature?



NOT FAITHLESS  
BUT BELIEVING

EXODUS 3:13-17    2 KINGS 17:1-18

LUKE 7:1-10    JOHN 3:1-21

ROMANS 4:1-25    HEBREWS 11:1-12:2

• UNTIL NOW WE have been considering three interlocking circles—the Church, the nation, and the university—each of which can be thought of as a chosen people with all the responsibilities that that involves. However, of these three it is the first in particular, that is the Church, which is *the Chosen People*, for while the nation and the university can be thought of as chosen with some special purpose in view, for the making known of God's revelation along one special line, yet the full meaning of what it involves to be a channel for God's revelation of himself must always be seen in the Church. It is the Church which sets—or should set—the standard by which other “chosen people” are measured. This does not mean for one moment that the Church has special privileges, or anything of that nature—surely this should be perfectly clear by now—but that it ought to be possible to say, “God has brought into being a certain group of people through whom he makes himself known to the rest of the world. He uses this people for this vitally important job and the sole reason for the existence of the people is that this job should be done. Therefore, if for any reason another group of people should need to think of themselves as being used by God to make something of his truth known, then

they ought to be able to look at *this* group and see what happens to a people whom God has started to use and how they behave."

If this is true, then it is obvious that we shall have to spend rather more time looking at the Church than we spend on studying the other groups, because the Church is really the best example of what we want to find out. Of course, later on we shall have to take a look at the other groups again and see what we have found out for the Church means in their sphere as well.

The difficulty is to know quite where to look. Till now we have been acting on the idea that where we have got to start all the time is the Bible, and certainly some people will say, "But of course! There isn't any other place where you can learn about the Church. If you want to find out what it is really like, you must read the New Testament." However, some people are equally certainly going to answer, "I don't see why 'of course' at all. The Bible was written an awfully long time ago and it doesn't seem in the very least to be talking about what I mean by the Church. Surely, if anything has changed, it is the Church, for in ancient times it was just a little group of people slinking round back streets to meet for worship because they were afraid of the police, and now it is clearly booming." This is obviously a difficulty. There is no doubt that the Church has gone on growing throughout the centuries and has developed out of all recognition, and it is no good wishing that it had not happened. It would be merely silly to spend our time talking about the Church if we let ourselves forget that for most people it means (1) a curious sort of Gothic building on the corner of Main Street, (2) the people who meet there every Sunday for worship and (3) a bigger society to which these people belong, such as the Episcopal Church or the Lutheran Church and so on. They are probably aware that behind all this there is something even

bigger called the Church Universal, but they are not quite sure what. Now it is this something bigger, this "we are not quite sure what," that we are really trying to talk about when we speak of the Church as the Chosen People, and this is where it is so useful to turn to the New Testament, because the New Testament writers could look at the Church when it was much smaller, they could see it as a whole, and so they were much more sure what it was.

All this means that we have to look at two kinds of Church at once. One is the present-day Church which is what we see and what we belong to. The other is what for convenience we may call the "theological" Church, which is the kind of real, true Church the New Testament writers were talking about. When we look at the real, true Church of the New Testament, we have to remember all the time that it would be a purely imaginary thing if it did not issue out in visible form in the "present-day Church" of every century. Even in New Testament days the Church did not exist in a sort of miraculous perfection without any men and women in it; there was always a "present-day Church" of that time, which was made up of men and women who were often not nearly as good as they ought to have been. At the same time, when we consider the "present-day Church" of our own time, we have always to remember that it does belong to the "theological" Church, the real, true Church, of which it is the visible form on earth, and that therefore, if it does not possess the characteristics of the real, true Church, it has to be considered to that extent a failure.

What we have to try to do is to let our minds swing back and forth from one "Church" to the other "Church," which is easier said than done. You may want to say, "Here, stop a minute, can't you? I don't know which 'Church' you are talking about." And the only answer to that, I'm afraid, is, "I'm really trying to talk about both at once."

### • THE NECESSITY OF FAITH

Now, even a very hurried reading of the Bible should make it clear that one of the marks of the People of God, of the Church, if you like, is their faith. Whatever else they do not do, one thing which is certainly always required of them is that they should believe in God. The abstract word "faith" is really a New Testament word and it hardly occurs in the Old Testament at all, but this does not mean that it is a virtue which came into being with the New Testament. Far from it, for the New Testament writers are always insisting that faith in God goes back at any rate as far as Abraham and even farther. Indeed, it was just because Abraham believed in God that he was considered to be such a righteous person. Obviously, an idea which is so constantly recurring in the Bible is one which is bound to collect round it a tremendous wealth of meaning, and it would be quite impossible to try to list all the passages in which some reference is made to the necessity of faith and to comment on the different shades of meaning in the different places. However, it is important to try to find out why faith is considered to be so very significant and what the marks of a faithful person are.

The first necessity is that people should believe that God really exists (Heb. 11:6) and the second is that they should believe that he has a definite and unchangeable nature, that he is utterly powerful and that he is righteous and holy and merciful, and also that he is active, interested and genuinely concerned to promote the well-being of the men and women he has created. The third necessity is that they should believe that he has done certain things in the course of history which have been of quite climactic importance, his "mighty acts," and that since he is what he is, these mighty acts will continue to be performed. A person who believes in God in the biblical sense has to believe that the world never gets out of God's control and that history is being directed by him to-



wards a very definite end which he has in mind. It is perfectly possible for men to accept this and, of their own free will, to set themselves to move in the same direction, or it is possible for them to reject the whole idea and to revolt against it. However, the Biblical view is that these revolts will be found afterwards to have backfired in some way, so that, as it were despite themselves, the rebels will be seen by later generations to have pushed the world a little further in the direction in which God wants it to go. However, by that time the rebels themselves will be dead and unable to take any further part in the matter.

From this it is clear that faith does not mean saying, "Sure, I accept that all right, but I don't see what I can do about it," because from the Biblical point of view, if you do not do something about it, then it means that you do not really believe. What made Abraham into such an outstanding person was that he was prepared to throw everything overboard and to go and start an entirely new life in a new country, because he believed that it was the right thing to do, because he believed that God was the kind of God who would not let him down. Later in his life, as we discussed in an earlier chapter, he went even further and showed himself ready to sacrifice the one sign that God had given him that he was going to keep his promise, Isaac, who was Abraham's only son, and this won him especial praise.

Similarly, when Moses asked God in the wilderness for some kind of guarantee with which he might convince the Israelites in Egypt that they really were going to be taken across the desert into Palestine, God refused to give him one. What Moses had asked was to know God's name so that he might tell it to the people, because, according to primitive belief, to know a person's name gave you a certain amount of hold over him. To know God's name, therefore, would be to have some assurance that he would not skip out of his side of

the agreement. God's answer, "I am who I am" meant in effect, "That kind of thing is all very well if you are dealing with men, but it will not do if you are dealing with me, because I am God. If you insist on any kind of guarantee, it means that you have a sneaking feeling at the back of your mind that perhaps either I cannot or I will not do what I say I will do. However, if you are prepared to go ahead without a guarantee, then it means that you really do believe."

### • WORSHIPING FALSE GODS

When the Israelites finally arrived in Palestine the problem met them in a new way. They had by that time accepted that they were guided and protected by a God whom they thought of as a powerful storm god who came to help them in time of war, "marching out of Edom" with all the dramatic panoply of a thunderstorm, but when they began to settle on the western side of the Jordan they found that they were among people who cultivated crops and tilled the soil, and were therefore utterly dependent upon a good supply of rain for their livelihood. In Palestine the summer is absolutely dry for a period of six months and ploughing cannot begin until the first rains of autumn have started, and so the Palestinian farmer waits anxiously during the months of October and November to see whether the rains will be early or late and give him therefore either a good or bad harvest. In ancient times he thought of the rain and hail and snow as being kept in huge barns somewhere above the sky, and it was for him of the first importance to know who kept the key of these supplies, so that he might be persuaded to unlock them in time. It is to these that the reference is made when God asks Job, "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?" (Job 38:22-23). The Israelite nomad, just beginning to turn his attention to agri-

culture, was bound to wonder whether his particular God knew what to do in this situation. It was so vitally important for him to have rain in time if he was to have any food for his family that he felt he could not afford to run risks; if his God was able to open the storehouses, then all was well, but what if he could not? Consequently, though he still continued to worship his own God, he often thought that it would be just as well to be on the safe side, to placate the other gods, just in case one of them might have the key after all. It was this being on the safe side which was so abhorrent to the prophets of the Old Testament. For them the most urgent question was always, "Do you really accept that God can do everything, or do you want to play it safe?" for "playing it safe" is the fundamental denial of God.

This was the sin of Ahab, of whom it is said that "as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him" (1 Kings 16:31). Ahab probably did not imagine that he was being disloyal to God at all, for he called all his children by names ending in *jah*, the Hebrew word for God, in the same way as other people of the period gave their children names ending in *baal*. He appears to have been the kind of man who goes faithfully to church every Sunday and tries to live a reasonably respectable life. It was not he who instituted the illegal proceedings against Naboth and he may even have been unaware of what was being done in his name. However, he was engaged, as his father had been before him, in a life and death struggle with the kingdom of Syria and for this reason maintained the treaty with the Phoenicians which his father had made and which had been sealed by his marriage to a Phoenician princess.

David had, in fact, done exactly the same thing and had married his son Solomon to a Phoenician princess for the

same reason. In accordance with custom this treaty between the nations was regarded as a treaty between their respective gods and provision was made in each of the two capitals for the foreign god to have a place of worship. Therefore Ahab built a temple for Astarte at Samaria just as Solomon had built her a temple outside Jerusalem and, if he had been challenged on the matter, would probably have argued that it was all very well to accept the standards of the Jewish God within the confines of the Israelite kingdom, but that would hardly help him in his struggle with Syria where he desperately needed an ally because Israel was not strong enough to resist by herself. What he would have argued, in fact, was that God's claims on him were limited and that in international politics a different standard was essential if the country was to survive at all.

The evil was accentuated, of course, by the fact that Jezebel herself was a strong-minded woman, who probably resented bitterly that she had to live out her days in the bucolic capital of Samaria instead of the more sophisticated court in which she had been reared, and who was not content with a mere temple for her goddess in Samaria itself but wished to enforce Phoenician standards and Phoenician morality throughout the kingdom. However, the root of the evil was not corruption and lower standards which were involved in Astarte worship where there was no conception of righteousness in the Biblical sense. It lay instead in the lack of faith in the power and authority of God which led Ahab and his advisers to argue that such things must be tolerated because the Phoenician treaty was essential to their security. It was for this that Elijah's question on Mount Carmel was, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21), for the Biblical argument always has been that either God has authority of the whole of man's life, or he



does not have authority at all. Man must admit that he is utterly in the hands of his Creator and must never at any time seek a security elsewhere, whether it be to offer prayers on the side to the village idol just in case he might have something to say in the distribution of the rain, or whether he says, "If I have to choose between absolute trust in God and making a treaty with a foreign power, than I am very sorry but I shall have to make the treaty, for the safety of my kingdom depends on it."

In the year 732 Samaria was finally taken by the King of Assyria and the people of the northern Kingdom were taken away in droves to exile and oblivion in the lands beyond the Euphrates, and the judgment of the writer of the Book of Kings upon this obliteration of as many as ten out of the twelve tribes of the Israelites was that it happened because they never grasped that this was what faith in God involved. In his words, "this was so, because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods. . . . They would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God" (2 Kings 17:7, 14). That lack of faith was their death sentence.

#### • FAITH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

By New Testament times the form of the question had somewhat changed. After the coming of Jesus Christ it no longer took the form of being predominantly, "Do you really accept that God will do all that is necessary?" though naturally this form of the question will continue to have some validity as long as men have got their lives to lead and are uncertain about the future. The predominant New Testament question is, "Do you believe that God *has done* all that is necessary?" This is what is behind those terrific questions

which St. Mark throws at his readers, "Why does this man speak thus? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" and later, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" and at Caesarea Philippi, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mark 2:7; 4:41; 8:29). It is behind Jesus' own insistence upon faith among those with whom he came in contact, were it even to be as small as a grain of mustard seed (Luke 17:5-6), and his apparent inability to do anything if it did not exist, as was the case at Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6). Each one of the Gospel writers makes it clear that what is needed is that people should have some idea, however badly formulated or insufficient, of who Jesus was *and should then act upon it*, should in fact start to lead their lives as if it were true, without waiting for further proof. If someone were prepared to go bald-headed at the impossible against every kind of human evidence, just because he believed in Jesus, if the man who had not been able to walk for years would try to do so, if the woman who had been crippled for eighteen years would struggle to stand up straight, if a pagan army officer said that he believed that Jesus was master of the elemental forces and merely had to give his orders, then all the power of God was present.

What was wrong with the Pharisees' approach was that they did not want to commit themselves; they wanted to play it safe. They did not wish to risk the security of their established position without some overwhelming sign which left the matter no longer in doubt, and it was this kind of attitude which earned one of Jesus' most scathing rejoinders, "Overwhelming proof is just what you cannot have," he said in effect, "an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign" (Matt. 12:39; 16:4). The word "adulterous" is particularly effective here, because it echoes the constant accusation of the prophets that in trying to play it safe and worship the other gods as well as their own the Israelites were as disloyal as the

man who would not commit himself entirely to one wife, but wanted to enjoy himself with other women also. Matthew drives home the lesson by his frequent use of the phrase, almost peculiar to his Gospel, "Ye of little faith," and in the Fourth Gospel there is this same conception of the paramount importance of faith. "He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God," is John's comment on the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3:18), and by this he means, not that one must have a sound intellectual understanding of the Second Person of the Trinity, but that one must accept God's unique action in Jesus Christ as effective and direct one's life accordingly. If a man is not prepared to commit himself in this manner, then it means that he is still harboring some secret doubts and does not wish to risk everything until he is quite sure. This is what condemns him. Very much later in the Gospel we find Jesus beginning the last conversation which he had with the eleven loyal disciples in the Upper Room with the words, "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).

In the early years of the Church the question became acute over the problem of circumcision. It was not that circumcision was wrong in itself. It had been laid down as a mark of the true believer far back in the Old Testament period, and Paul saw nothing wrong in having Timothy circumcised when he wanted to take him on one of the missionary journeys and feared that there might be a lot of tedious and unnecessary arguments if this were not done (Acts 16:3). What was wrong was the way in which circumcision had come to be regarded. In very simple terms what was happening was this. Jewish Christians were beginning to say about their Gentile brethren, "It's all very well their saying that they believe in Jesus Christ and that they have given up their old way of life

and that they are going to heaven, but how can they be so sure of it? They aren't doing so very much that we can see to get there. It's altogether different with us, because we believe in Jesus and we have been circumcised as well and keep the Law. This really makes it doubly sure." So they used to tell the Gentiles that they ought to be circumcised as well and start to keep the Law because they were not doing enough as it was. As a result people like the Galatians began to be worried and to say to each other, "Perhaps there is something in what they say. Of course, I know that really it's probably quite all right, and it is stupid to be worried, but just to be on the safe side it might be as well if we were all circumcised, and then there would not be any doubt about the matter." Consequently, some of them did have themselves circumcised and they started to try to keep the Jewish Law, and naturally they started also to tell their friends how much more secure they felt and to suggest that others ought to follow their example.

It was this "being on the safe side" which so disturbed Paul and which he fought so vigorously, because he saw clearly what the Old Testament prophets had seen before him, that a guarantee of safety is really a danger rather than a security. When men think that they have got some kind of proof that things are going to be all right for them, then sooner or later they begin to think that they can do without God, that they can go it on their own. This is what Jesus meant when he said that the only kind of proof which men can have that they are on the right lines is when they are jeered at and slandered and beaten up (Matt. 5:11), because then they have no temptation to think that they can go it alone. Consequently, Paul hammered away at his Gentile converts and said, "God has saved you by what he has done in Jesus Christ. You haven't got to do anything more. If you had to, you would only get conceited about it. So don't think that you can get some



kind of hold on God by being circumcised or by doing anything else at all." (See Eph. 2:8-9.) Just how insidious is this temptation to feel that somewhere there is something which guarantees our salvation is shown by the fact that both Paul and James found themselves having to speak rather sharply to people who began to say that faith itself was the guarantee, and that because they believed in what God had done through Jesus Christ, they could relax and were free to do more or less what they liked (1 Cor. 6:12 ff.; Jas. 2:18-26).

### • TRUSTING IN WORKS

This desire to find something which men can do so that they are not so utterly dependent upon God has persisted throughout the history of the Church and more than once has become an urgent question. Thus in the later Middle Ages the idea had grown up that while there was a certain minimum of good works which every Christian must do, there was also more that they ought to be doing. Fundamentally, the idea would not have been such a bad one if it had not been misused and misunderstood. What the teaching was trying to say to the people was this: "There are some things which really cannot be excused, things like adultery and stealing, if the Christian society is to be any better than a mere pagan one. However, don't think that you can stop there. There are lots of other things which you can do and should do, such as visiting the sick and clothing the poor. In just the same way, you must give a certain proportion of your money in charity, for no one can be excused who does not give anything at all. However, if you want to be really good, you will give more than that."

What went wrong was that people began to think that if they did the something more, they would have something in the bank, so to speak, which would be a kind of guarantee that they would be admitted to heaven. They began to feel

that they would be able to say to God on the Last Day, "It's all very well talking to me nastily about what I did to Mary Higgins that night I was so drunk. Sure, I know her child is mine, but what of it? Have you forgotten all the other children I went out of my way to help year after year after Christmas?" Of course, they did not put it into so many words, but that was the way their thinking went and it was that kind of thinking which roused the Reformers to say, as Paul had said before them, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). They insisted that men could not build any kind of security which would enable them to have firm ground on which to stand when they faced God on the Last Day; they must put all their trust in God who has made them, in the fact that he is merciful, and in the fact that he has already done what is necessary and has given man salvation as a free gift. Men must swallow their pride and accept this gift, not even allowing themselves to think that at least they can be praised for accepting the gift.

In this insistence upon the overwhelming importance of humble, unquestioning trust in God and in what he has done for us in Jesus Christ the Reformers were directly in the line of the biblical tradition. Enough has been said, surely, to make it clear that the Bible is shot through and through with the idea that faith in what God is and in what he has done is absolutely necessary to People of God.

### • THE NECESSITY OF PREACHING

There is a difficulty about this, as Paul points out in his letter to the Romans, because if people are to accept this and direct their lives accordingly, they have got to be told about it. In the tenth chapter he tells his readers, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart

that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved," and he quotes from Joel 2:32 the words, "All who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered." However, he goes on, "But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:9, 14). The corollary of the fact that man's only possible security is in trusting himself unreservedly to God is that he has to be told about God, about what he is like and what he has done. Faith, therefore, demands proclamation and it is true that the excellence of their preaching has been one of the glories of those churches which take their origin from the great continental Reformers.

This preaching consists in making known the good news about Jesus Christ and, once again like Paul, the Reformers found it necessary to insist that what they were teaching was not a private invention of their own. Twice in one letter Paul told the Corinthians, "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast . . . what I also received . . ." (1 Cor. 15:1-3; cf. 11:22). Paul was able to say that he had received it from the other apostles, or even directly "from the Lord," but the Reformers were too far removed from the events about which they were speaking to be able to say that. Therefore, they appealed to the Bible as the Word of God and made it clear that they taught nothing which was not to be found within its pages. This became for them, inevitably, the authority, the standard by which the preaching of the Church could be measured and judged.

None of this, of course, is in the very least disagreeable to the Christian faith. The Bible is undoubtedly the Word of God and any teaching which is in conflict with what is found

there must, to say the very least, be discouraged in Christian pulpits. Moreover, preaching there must be, for there is no more effective way in which God's revelation of himself can be made known to men than by the constant speaking of it in places where men are gathered together, and this preaching must always take the form of calling men to place their whole trust in God, who alone is absolute power, and to seek no other security. None of those who profess and call themselves Christian would be likely to deny the importance of these things, even their basic and quite fundamental importance.

#### • THE DANGER OF FAITH

Nevertheless, there is a certain danger that too much importance may be attached to them, that in their constant search for security men may make these things into absolutes. I remember reading in a travel book years ago an account of how a husky Negro in Africa had fallen into the coils of a huge python and had yet survived. The reason for this was that the encounter had taken place on a great open space of bare earth where there was nothing to which the python could anchor itself and thus get leverage with which to crush the man, and though the great tail had writhed all over the bare ground, it had failed to contact anything sufficiently strong. Just for a moment it had gripped a tiny shrub and that had given it sufficient purchase and a brief flash of advantage, but the bush had broken and the snake was once more helpless. Now, men are very like this python, casting about all the time to find something which will give them an advantage, something of which they can say, "This is it! This in the last resort is what our salvation depends on. Once we have done this, we can relax." Thus they slip little by little into thinking that in the last resort what is needed is faith and the absolute authority for this faith is the Word



of God as contained in the Bible. Other things, they will readily admit, are of tremendous importance, but they say, in the final analysis they are secondary, for faith is what is ultimately required and for this faith the Bible is the ultimate authority.

Now, if one looks at the branches of the great Christian Church throughout the world with an unprejudiced eye, it would be difficult to deny that there are those—perhaps rather particularly those which stem from the Reformation in Europe—which do tend to take this attitude. It is very important to understand that this is not the whole of their teaching. They do teach most emphatically that other things are important as well. However, if pressed in argument, they will tend to stress these things as over against the others, and, when they have to choose in a course of sermons or of church school lessons what to emphasize when time is short and they wish to build up the congregation, it is these things which receive the greatest attention. It is on these things, justification by faith and the authority of the Bible, that they take their stand and to these things nothing could ever make them disloyal. This is their heritage.

It is at this point that we have to notice a very curious phenomenon: those same people who lay most stress upon the absence of any security and upon the necessity of accepting salvation as a free gift from God, give outsiders the impression that they are making that very acceptance of the free gift a security in itself and are saying in effect, "This at last is it! Now we can relax." Their insistence upon justification by faith tends to move the emphasis from the second noun to the first, so that instead of stressing the importance of faith they appear to be insisting that they and not others are justified. This is a tendency which we have already noticed above. However, it goes further, for those same people who stress the importance of preaching and who, in their

transformation of the medieval Gothic churches and cathedrals of Europe, have shifted the seats so that the focus of attention is no longer the altar but the pulpit, are very, very far from being the leaders in the missionary movement. Moreover, when missionaries have gone out from their midst (and it must not be imagined that they have not many important and flourishing missions) it would seem that they have gone out rather from the pietists and not the most orthodox sections of those churches. Even at home, in Europe and America, where preaching has always been of primary importance, it has been marred only too often by a strange intellectualism and heaviness which is the very opposite of the proclamation of the gospel. Those same people who laid most emphasis upon the authority of the Bible have been oddly blind to its spirit, and this led them into sad errors of judgment about the Bible in the nineteenth century struggle of the scientists and theologians.

It is not being suggested for one moment that this is universally true of these churches. It is not being suggested that they are in any way inferior to other branches of the Christian Church. It is not being suggested that other branches do not also have their weaknesses. Please do not leap to the defence of these people as if they were being unfairly criticized or condemned. All that is being suggested here is that it is very curious that such weaknesses as they have should be just in this quarter rather in another for, whereas they themselves would never for a moment deny the doctrine of faith or the authority of the Bible, it seems to outsiders as if by their actions these are just the things which they are denying.

It is certainly odd, when you come to think of it.

## ONE BODY IN CHRIST

2 KINGS 4:8-37; 5:1-14    JOHN 17:1-26  
ACTS 2:36-42    1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

• ONE SERIOUS OBJECTION to this emphasis upon faith with its consequent emphasis also upon the preaching of the Word of God is that the Word of God cannot really be put into words. Words are things which men have invented to describe their own experiences and we have not got any words at all for what does not in some way belong to this experience. However, God is essentially not part of our experience—he is outside it and beyond it, and he comes into our experience only because that is what he chooses to do. Therefore, when we try to describe God in words we are rather like people attempting to wrap a very large balloon in sheets of newspaper—the paper is not big enough and the balloon keeps on escaping their control. In the same way God is always greater than anything we say about him and when we try to describe him or his activity or what he has done for us in Jesus Christ we do him a disservice, because we start imposing artificial, human limits upon him, and that, as we saw in the first chapter, is a thing we must try never to do. This does not mean, of course, that we must stop preaching—that would be absurd—but it does mean that there is a danger in relying on preaching.

This is dimly realized by those people who maintain that “Christianity is caught and not taught,” because what they

are trying to say by this is that Christianity is really a way of life which must be lived. Christ did not leave us either a law to be obeyed or a book of teaching such as Mohammed left his followers (though, to be sure, a lot of time is spent by good Christian people providing his followers with just those very things). What he did do was to come and live among us and leave us an example, which he told us quite bluntly we could not contrive to follow if we tried to do it by ourselves. "Apart from me you can do nothing," he said (John 15:5). Therefore, when we say in our prayers, "Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves,"\* we are stating more than that we live by faith and that we make no claim on God; we are saying that the life, the power, the essential energy is missing when we are left to ourselves. "You must be born anew," said Christ to Nicodemus (John 3:3) and throughout the epistles there runs this idea that the Christian people are a new creation. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Jas. 1:18). This new creature is living and active, however, only when there is the closest possible connection with Christ himself. This is what Paul means when he speaks of the Christian being "in Christ" or, alternatively, of Christ being "in you" (Rom. 8:1, 10; Col. 1:27).

This is worked out at greater length in chapters 14-17 of John's Gospel, in which Christ identifies himself with his disciples and the disciples with him in a truly remarkable way. "I am the vine, you are the branches," he tells them. "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit." He compares this identity which he has with the disciples

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\* *Book of Common Prayer*, Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent.



with the identity which he has with God: "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (14:20). In the great high priestly prayer he keeps on coming back to this: "As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world," and later, "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (17:18, 22-23). It is really an extraordinary parallel to make and one which we would never have dared to make for ourselves. As the argument develops, though he does at first mention individuals, as in 15:5, the idea of the disciples as a corporate group becomes uppermost, and here it is necessary for us to see that in the New Testament the Church is always more than a group of individuals in whom Christ lives. Instead the Church has a corporate reality which is greater than the number of separate persons of which it is made up.

This becomes apparent when we consider the metaphors used in the epistles to describe the Church, sometimes worked out fairly fully and sometimes used merely in passing as if it were expected that they would be immediately understood. There are four which perhaps occur more frequently than others. They are the metaphor of the *household* or *family*, as "the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10), or the "household of God" (Eph. 2:19), in which Christians are the "sons of God" (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:1-7; Heb. 12:4-13; 1 John 3:1-2). The second is also a metaphor of a family relationship, being that of a husband and wife, in which the Church is the *Bride of Christ* (Eph. 5:22-23; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17). Then there is the picture of the Church as the *Body of Christ* (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-30; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:24-27) and finally the picture of the Church as a *building* in which Christ is the chief corner-stone (1 Cor. 3:9-16; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:5).

What is almost equally interesting is the relative absence from the epistles of the metaphor of the flock, which is so

extremely common in the Old Testament and has the authority of Christ himself, who used it frequently. In the epistles it occurs mainly in 1 Peter, where it is probably a direct remembrance of Christ's teaching (1 Pet. 5:2-3; 2:25), and also in Hebrews 13:20. Elsewhere it is not found. The explanation of this is probably that the metaphors which were used conveyed a meaning which is certainly not suggested by the picture of a crowd of silly, straggling sheep—that of corporate unity, an indivisible oneness, which is so characteristic of the New Testament conception of the Church. We in the West today have largely lost the idea of the solid compactness of the family and tend to think of it as a collection of different persons, each of whom is free to live his own life, but that kind of idea is very foreign to the thinking of the Middle East, where your family is an unbreakable reality to which you cannot but belong and which has claims on you wherever you are. The same is true also of the other metaphors, for it insisted more than once in the Bible that husband and wife are no longer two people, but one (Matt. 19:6; 1 Cor. 7:4; Eph. 5:28) and what could be more of a solid, obvious unity than a body or a well-constructed building?

#### • SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL

From this it is clear that the Church is a corporate entity, an organic, living reality which is hurt when its arms and legs are cut off. However, this is not just a spiritual truth which has no connection with the common or garden, ordinary Church which we know here on earth. It is not possible for us to say, "Of course, we are really all one in the Spirit," as if that were all that mattered, because such an idea is flatly contrary to the thinking of the New Testament, and indeed of the whole Bible, where the spiritual and material are inextricably mixed up with each other. We are rather too apt

in many Western churches today to begin our Sunday services by quoting from our Lord's conversation with the woman of Samaria, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24), as if for this brief hour of ecstasy we could slough off the unspiritual things with which we are forced to occupy ourselves during the rest of the week, and we forget that the same Person who made this statement we are so fond of using also told Nicodemus that he must be born of water as well as of the spirit. This insufficiency of the spirit by itself is borne out later by Peter's question in Acts 10:47, for on that occasion it was evident to everyone that Cornelius and his family had been baptized spiritually, but this was not complete until they had been baptized materially as well.

This kind of idea is not confined to the New Testament—indeed, no idea can be Christian if it is not rooted and grounded in the Old Testament—and for evidence of this we may turn to two very interesting stories about Elisha, to two stories of his miracles which are told in great detail. One of them is the healing of Naaman the leprous Syrian captain (2 Kings 5:1-14). Naaman was very like a lot of us; he wanted to have a fine spiritual experience and was altogether disgusted when he found that he could not have it, but was expected instead to wash himself as best he could in a singularly muddy little stream, for the Jordan is no more than that. He "was angry, and went away, saying, 'Behold, I thought that he would come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper.' . . . So he turned and went away in a rage" (2 Kings 5:11-12). Fortunately for him, he was persuaded to think better of it and do as the prophet told him with the result that he got the cure he hoped for.

The other story is the one which comes in the chapter before, about the Shunammite woman's son, who died of

sunstroke and whom Elisha restored to life again. He did this by lying upon the child, "his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands" (2 Kings 4:34), repeating this with an interval of prayer until the child suddenly sneezed and came to life again. This story is often quoted by ministers in their sermons as an illustration of how much greater Christ was, for he could raise the dead by a mere command. However, it is doubtful whether this is the right interpretation, for we find Christ himself using material means, especially spittle (Mark 7:33; 8:23; John 9:6), and apparently choosing on occasions to work in this fashion. In fact, his readiness to use material things for spiritual purposes was something of a scandal to the religious people of his day, as appears from the argument which developed immediately after he had fed the multitude with a handful of bread and fish. In Mark's Gospel the feeding of the four thousand is followed by the statement (Mark 8:11) that the Pharisees came to Jesus demanding a sign from heaven, which upset him very greatly so that he left them and went back across the lake. In the exceedingly concise account of Mark this seems a quite extraordinary request, for they had just had a notable "sign." What, in heaven's name, could they ask for more than that? But when we turn to John, the reason for their demand becomes clear, for there the discussion after the feeding of the five thousand is given at some length. To start off with, Jesus rebukes the crowd for being utterly materialistic and not bothering about the spiritual life as long as they could have plenty of free bread and fish, but then he gets embroiled with the Pharisees, who want everything on a purely spiritual plane. "What sign are you going to give us?" they ask him. "Moses gave us bread from heaven, but what about you?" thereby suggesting that if all he could do was to increase the supply of perfectly ordinary bread and fish, then it wasn't good enough. It was all very



remarkable, no doubt, but it wasn't at all the same kind of thing as heavenly food. It is from this demand that there developed the long argument in which our Lord insisted so strongly, almost brutally, in fact, that they could live forever only if they were prepared to accept his material terms, which meant eating his flesh and drinking his blood. When they said that they were surprised at him for talking like that, he merely went on to put it even more bluntly, so that in the end crowds of them got up and left him, and he did nothing to stop them (John 6:25-66).

It is an interesting argument altogether, because of Christ's insistence throughout on both the material and the spiritual: on the one hand he says, "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail" (John 6:63), but on the other he insists, despite their protests, that they must eat his flesh. It completely confused the Pharisees because they did not see that he was talking of the material and the spiritual as being closely connected with each other. Instead, like so many of us, they were keeping them quite separate in their minds and so when he spoke of his flesh, they thought of the material substance and nothing else and were thus just bewildered. But what really shocked them was when he went on to talk about drinking his blood, because for them blood *had* got more than a material significance; it represented the life, and therefore they carefully drained the blood out of any piece of meat they were to eat. It was at this point that a great many of his disciples decided to have nothing more to do with him; they were not unwilling to eat purely material bread and fish when he gave it to them, but they were not prepared to accept his life when he offered it, especially when he offered it in such curiously material terms.

The situation of the modern Western Christian is somewhat different. We are quite ready to accept Christ's life, but we also are not too keen on the terms, because what

we do not want to have from him is the material. We would much prefer, a very great many of us, that the Holy Communion should be entirely a great spiritual experience, a solemn service in memory of our Lord's last meal on earth. It is that, of course. That is not to be doubted for one moment. Yet it is difficult to believe that upon New Testament grounds we can argue that that is all there is to it, and there is some justification for thinking that those who hold this view have not quite grasped the New Testament attitude, indeed the attitude of the whole Bible to the material and the spiritual. If it were only a question of the Communion, there would certainly be strong arguments for keeping the material and the spiritual separate and not getting involved in such an unhappy question. However, the Bible is full of this conception. From the moment when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters the impossibility of separating the material has persisted. Descriptions of God remain vulgarly anthropomorphic, the sacrificial system continues, God reveals himself in history (and such history—bloody massacre and the like!), the prophets are not content with mere teaching but constantly do things which are held to be significant, so that Isaiah can say, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel" (Isa. 8:18). Finally, God himself becomes man, and, not content with that, comes to life again after he has been very efficiently killed. One of the most interesting features of modern religious thought in the West is the tendency to insist that the resurrection was all very spiritual, when the New Testament writers themselves, though they were obviously laughed at for saying so, are at pains to point out that it was not like that at all. We are bound to ask ourselves whether this quite extraordinary mixture of the material and the spiritual is not part and parcel of the Revelation of God and whether it would not have been a new departure for

Christ if he had instituted something purely spiritual when he told his disciples to continue celebrating the Last Supper. And so we are faced with it, with the bread and the wine, the Body and the Blood, the material and the spiritual, and we cannot have one without the other, just as water and the spirit are both necessary to baptism.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the New Testament the Church also is held to have this curious double character, this strange mixture of material and spiritual at the same time. It is spoken of as being a real and living thing, not just a conception, a wonderful spiritual idea, but an actuality, with a continuing life which is the life of Christ himself. There is thought to be a living, actual connection between the people who have gone before and the people who are coming after, a connection which works both ways, so that it is not felt to be at all stupid if a person is baptized today on behalf of someone who died a few years back.\* The laying on of hands is thought of, not as being merely symbolic, not even as having such a deep symbolic meaning as the American flag, but as being somehow a "real" thing, so that if only you could get far enough away from it all you would see a connected and organic whole, something rather like a tree, with a visible link extending from Jesus Christ himself through the apostles and early Christians to the bishops, priests, and deacons of today. If that picture does not satisfy you, try thinking of a waterfall or of the "plume-cloud" which develops sometimes on top of a mountain. In one sense there is no such thing as a waterfall as a solid concrete fact; there are only millions and millions of drops of waters rushing over a cliff-face. The waterfall isn't a solid reality so that you could cut out that bit of the river and take it away with you as a souvenir. And yet it is real, so real that you can

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\* This seems to be what is meant by 1 Cor. 15:29.

photograph it and take your Aunt Mary to see it when she comes to stay. But, of course, you have got to be outside the waterfall to see it; if you were one of the drops of water hurtling down to the rocks beneath, you would not find it easy to believe if one of the other drops of water said to you, in a superior fashion, "Actually, of course, you and I are part of a quite unusually beautiful feature of the landscape, which people have been coming miles to see for years and years." Your reply, if you had time to make one, would probably be, "Don't be silly, we're here only for about sixty seconds."

#### • WHEN WE THINK SACRAMENTALLY

When the Church thinks of itself in this way as a solid, real thing, living and growing just because it is "one thing," then it does not easily break into pieces, for the members of it realize that that would be a very stupid as well as a very wicked thing to do. The branches of a vine do not go on living and having grapes when they are cut off from the vine itself, and a man's arm is quite useless if it is separated from the body. Not only that, but the other arm, even though it is still firmly attached to the body, cannot do as much if there is only one of it. This is what Paul is getting at when he uses the metaphor of the Body of Christ, that there is a solid, concrete reality called the Church, and we do it harm to divide it into pieces. It is not surprising therefore, that those who historically have held this view, which has every biblical justification, that is, especially the Roman Catholic and the Anglican or Protestant Episcopal Church, have shown an extraordinary power of cohesion. It is not always realized by those who do not belong to it that the Roman Church has managed somehow to contain the most amazingly diverse groups and has kept within itself rebel after rebel. The Reformation was, in fact, an exception in its his-



tory just as the breaking off by the Methodists was an exception in the history of the Anglican Communion. Both these breaks were due in very large measure, it must be admitted frankly, to serious weakness and blindness in the parent body, but against these must be set the number of times when a split ought to have happened, at any rate in the expectation of outside observers, and yet did not. It is worthy of notice, for instance, that neither the Protestant Episcopal, nor the Roman Church split at the time of the Civil War in this country, and that the almost constant procession of Catholic immigrants from many varied parts of the world brought about no division, though they have had such widely differing outlooks that demands for separate organizations within the Church have more than once been made. This is in striking contrast to the divisions which have occurred within most of the other, Protestant, groups.

Another result of this idea of the Church as a single organism with a real and actual sacramental life has been the missionary outreach, for a living thing must constantly grow and develop, or it must die. Therefore, the purpose of the Church's living unity has been not that it may live but that it may grow. Christ prayed "not for these only, but also for those who are to believe in me through their word," and he asked the Father that the disciples might "become perfectly one so that the world may know" (John 17:20, 23). Consequently, an immense amount of missionary work has been done by both the Roman and the Anglican Communion, the Romans blazing the trail, in fact, in most parts of the world. This great missionary endeavor has been certainly due in part to the opportunities offered by the fact that the greatest empires were Portuguese, Spanish, British, and French, countries that are predominantly either Roman or Anglican, but this is not the whole reason, because a vast amount of the missionary work has been done in areas for

which these countries had no special responsibility, as for instance, the pioneer work done by the Roman Catholics in the countries of Eastern Asia. Moreover, the missionaries were often in a country long before the government took over and sometimes even urged their governments to enter the area in order to bring peace and security to regions where they were conspicuously lacking. It must not be thought that *all* colonial development was of the "snatch and grab" kind which characterized the end of the nineteenth century. Some of it was undertaken with much worthier motives. The spread northwards of British power from the South African port of Capetown after the Napoleonic wars, for instance, was resisted by the British Government, which gave way largely because the missionaries insisted that it must intervene in order to ensure peace and suppress slavery.

Nevertheless, serious weaknesses characterize both of these great "Catholic" communions. One of them is perhaps to be expected, in view of their emphasis upon the ministry of the sacrament—a weakness in preaching. There is no doubt that the sermons play a smaller part in their worship and the standard of preaching is often unhappily low. Further, the biblical instruction given in this country by the Protestant Episcopal Church in their church schools has, to say the least, not the solidity of that given by, say, the Baptists or the Presbyterians. Likewise, the Roman Catholic Church, though it has often been responsible for quite outstanding schools and colleges, has also, especially in countries where it has not been greatly challenged by the Protestants, been content with a frankly deplorable standard of education.

The second weakness is somewhat more surprising, because once more it consists of denying the very thing they believe in most, or, at any rate, it cannot but look like that to the outsider. Thus these churches which hold so strongly the conception that there can be only one Church and that

this Church is capable of containing within itself the most diverse elements, appear to those outside them to be the most exclusive of all and they scandalize the devout Protestant by their practice of a closed Communion and the apparent obstacles they place in the way of re-union. The refusal of the Anglican bishops at the Lambeth Conference to enter into communion with the Church of South India, despite all the concessions made by the non-Anglican sections of that Church was, to those who are outside the Anglican Communion, a very shocking thing.

It must not be thought that their reasons for doing so are lighthearted or factious. On the contrary, those who oppose the practice of open communion or set themselves against the union with the Church of South India do so out of a deep and real sense of devotion to their Lord. They see the sacramental life of the Church as a precious gift from God, a gift which they have in no sense deserved, but which has come to them only because of the boundless love and generosity of God himself. Therefore, for them to do anything at all which would appear to minimize or sully the quality, the depth, the reality of this gift would be the blackest betrayal, deep ingratitude, and an open denial of Christ's sacrifice of himself on the Cross. And it must be admitted that they have been given cause for their attitude. There are, for instance, many Episcopal churches in this country where it is customary to have an open communion and in the course of the service to invite all Christians present to receive. However, when one sees, as I have seen, a man stand upon the steps of the church just outside the door smoking a cigarette until the very last moment before the service begins, or walk up to the altar rail with his hands in his pockets, one cannot but wonder if he really knows where he is and what he is doing.

Nevertheless, when all this is said, the scandal of exclus-

iveness remains and there is no doubt that in the eyes of the outsiders it is a scandal, because it seems to them to be a denial of the very thing which those of "Catholic" persuasion say they would rather go to the stake than deny—the oneness of the Church as the living body of Christ and the reality of the sacraments. I, myself, am of the Anglican Communion and I believe wholeheartedly the view of the nature of the Church put forward in this chapter, and yet I am driven to believe that God is asking us today those same questions which through the mouths of his prophets and apostles and of Christ himself he asked of those before us. It is impossible to pretend that the Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and the rest do not manifestly show forth the fruits of the Spirit. They are living and vigorous bodies of Christians in whom the Holy Spirit is clearly at work and if that is so, then Peter's question must surely speak to us: "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47). It is difficult to see why one sacrament must be thought different from the other.

This is not the only time this kind of question is put, for it is part of the stuff of which the Bible is made. Paul bluntly asked the Corinthians, "What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" (1 Cor. 4:7). If then it is a gift, and indeed, if that is why it is held to be so sacred that it must not be entrusted to those who are not worthy, we must take the consequences of the fact that it does not, in the last resort, belong to us. "Can I not do as I like with what is my own?" says God (Matt. 20:15); "Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Luke 3:8). And if our plea is that it is more than a gift, it is the place where above all other places God comes to us, is not



God's reply likely to be, "Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name to dwell at first, and see what I did to it" (Jer. 7:12)?

These are not isolated fragments which have been torn from their context, but represent one of the recurrent themes of the Bible, for it is fundamental to biblical thinking that nothing, literally nothing, is so sacred that God himself is not ready to destroy it, if it should ever stand in the way of his righteousness. God seems at times to be amazingly careless about his honor and dignity, which perhaps is just as well, because he would hardly have come and lived among men if he had been greatly troubled about that. Of course, it should not surprise us as much as it does, because even among men it is true that those who are most certain of their position feel little necessity to demand that it should be appreciated. Nevertheless, it is not easy for men to believe this about God, and yet it is very important that we should. If, for instance, it should ever become God's purpose that his church should be visibly unified here on earth, then nothing—once again, literally nothing—would be allowed to stand in his way. Woe in that day to those men who were found to be making out of God's most precious gift to them an obstacle to his purposes. It would not go well with them!

Thus we surely begin to see that there is a singular danger in holding a position in which we say, "This is *the* mark of the Church! Other things are doubtless of very great importance, but in the last resort they are relative to this essential characteristic." This is equally dangerous whether the position we take is that of those who say, "The essential mark of the Church is faith, a willing acceptance of all that God has done for us, and therefore the final authority has to be the Bible, the one place where 'we know the truth concerning the things of which we have been informed,' " (Luke 1:4) or whether our argument is, "The essential mark

of the Church is its life, for it is the very Body of Christ himself, and therefore the final authority must be the Church itself. It is the Church which interprets the Bible." It is a singular danger, because it is beginning to appear that the moment we say, "This is the one thing which we must never betray," we are likely to be found betraying that very thing.

TO THE HOLY SPIRIT  
AND TO US

ACTS 2:1-21; 11:16-18; 19:1-6

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-13; 13; 14

• AT THE BEGINNING of the Acts of the Apostles Luke tells us that while Jesus was still with his disciples in the days between Easter and the Ascension he “charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 1:4-5). Apparently, then, the Church could not begin until the Holy Spirit had come down upon the apostles and, after that, it would seem that he took charge of them. He said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2), and later, when Paul and Timothy had gone to Galatia, they were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia” and, when they tried to go to Bithynia, “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” (Acts 16:6-7). From the very start there could be no Church without the Holy Spirit and even devout people who had already been “baptized with the baptism of repentance” had to be baptized again because they said that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. But when this was done, “the Holy Spirit came on them” (Acts 19:1-7).

It would seem from this that it is not enough to have unquestioning faith in God, nor is it enough to be the Body of

Christ and to have this continuing life with the incarnate Word which we discussed in the last chapter. There has got to be more than this. There has got to be the Spirit himself, for he is as essential to the true Church as either of the other two characteristics which we have been considering.

This makes it of very great importance that we should pay attention to the manner in which the Holy Spirit is spoken of in both the Acts of the Apostles and in the Fourth Gospel. In both these books he is very clearly a person and, what is more, a person over against other persons, and this brings us very close to the heart of the mystery of the individual within the group. In the last chapter we were reminding ourselves that the Church is a body, an organic whole, the Body of Christ in fact, in whom both man and God are indissolubly bound together. The Church is therefore not, most emphatically not, merely a collection of individuals. Nevertheless, this body is undoubtedly made up of individuals. That it is composed of single human beings, each of infinite value before God, not one of whom must ever be confused with another, is a fact which must never be forgotten. This sacred importance of each separate individual person was emphasized by Christ when he said to his disciples, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:29-32).

Of course, the community, the body, the family, the organic whole—whatever you like to call it—is a reality, but it is not the only reality. On the one hand it is true that Christ gives his life to the whole body, and indeed, we make a great mistake if we think of the Lord's Supper as being a feast of which each one partakes as an individual for the private salva-



tion of his own soul. It is essentially a corporate act. On the other hand, within this body every person has an individual responsibility which he cannot escape, and every group decision is reached only after there has been discussion and argument among the individuals of whom the group is composed.

Here we begin to see how the dilemma which has been appearing in the course of the last two chapters is to be resolved. The dilemma is this: there is no one truth, or more accurately, there is no one facet of the truth, to which we can point and say, "This is it; this is the fundamental Fact, and all other facts are derived from this One." Yet, because of our limited outlook, our finite human nature, even the most brilliant of us can see only one part of the infinite truth, and because of our pride, because of our incorrigible tendency to sin, we find ourselves slipping again and again into saying, "This part which we can see is not really a part; it is the very core of Truth itself." Thus, there is the most vital and urgent need of correctives. We have, each one of us, to admit that even our most dearly held belief, the belief which is the very foundation of our being and our faith, is no more than just a part of the whole, and, in order that this may be evident, this dearly held belief of ours must constantly be challenged by men and women to whom God has given the understanding of some other part of his truth.

It is easy, of course, to say this, but it is far from easy that it should be done. This kind of challenging cannot be anything else but wounding, for it touches the innermost part of a man's being and questions the very things which are most dear to him. It is not surprising, therefore, that it leads only too often to dissension and bitterness, and yet, because each person in the debate is *right*, there can be no decision. The dilemma can be resolved only if the debate is not between two people but three, and if the third person is someone of infin-

ite patience and understanding and someone, moreover, who can speak with authority.

It is in this sense in which the Holy Spirit is spoken of in very much of the New Testament. Jesus told his disciples that when the Spirit came he would convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, almost as if he were going to take part in an argument, and said that he would guide the disciples along the road (John 16:8, 13). Other people in the world do not know this Spirit and, in fact, cannot even see him, but Christians can, and he teaches them and reminds them about all the things that Jesus said (John 14:17, 26). This picture of the Holy Spirit talking to the members of the Church and telling them what to do is continued also in the Acts, for we are told that "the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join his chariot,' " and at Joppa, after Peter had had a vision on the roof of the house and was wondering what it meant, "the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you.'" Consequently when the three men arrived, Peter accepted their invitation to go to Caesarea, and this led to the baptism of Cornelius, the first Gentile to become a Christian, an action which was much criticized by some of the other disciples. In the council meeting which was held to look into the matter Peter justified his behavior by saying, "The Spirit told me to go with them," and this explanation completely silenced his critics (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12). At a subsequent meeting the Holy Spirit is spoken of almost as if he were a member of the council, and in the report of their findings the apostles say, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." as if there were nothing at all incongruous in the expression.

Paul also writes in the same vein, as when he says that when we cry, "Abba, Father!" it is the Spirit joining with our spirit to say these words, because the "sons of God" are all the people whom the Spirit is leading (Rom. 8:14-16), and later in

the same chapter he speaks of the Spirit as having a mind of his own (v. 27). In the Book of Revelation the writer four times tells the reader to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29).

This idea of a personal conversation between God and man is not peculiar to the New Testament, but is foreshadowed in the Old. Indeed, it could not be a Christian idea if this were not so. Thus when Moses complained that he had too much work to do and that it was killing him, God told him to collect seventy men at the tent of meeting "and I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them" (Num. 11:17). Very much earlier, also, Abraham is represented as arguing with God and persuading him not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, if it can possibly be avoided, "and the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place" (Gen. 18:22-33). When God spoke to Samuel as a little boy, he was convinced that he had heard an ordinary person calling his name and thought it had been Eli, and after him the prophets spoke as if a similar experience had been theirs. "The Lord of Hosts has revealed himself in my ears," said Isaiah (22:14) and elsewhere, in a passage of truly remarkable perception, he almost anticipates Jesus' phrases about the Spirit teaching the disciples everything and guiding them into all truth, when he says, "Your eyes shall see your Teacher, and your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left" (30:20-21). Both Micah and Hosea speak of the Lord having a controversy with his people (Hos. 3:1; Mic. 6:2) and Jeremiah says that the time is coming when it shall no longer be necessary for men to teach each other about God, because everyone will have direct personal contact with him (Jer. 31:34).

This idea of God entering directly into the colloquy of in-



dividuals and taking part in their conversations almost as if he were one of them, is an immensely pregnant and valuable one. It may shock you, but then a great many truths about God are shocking. "My ways are not your ways, neither are my thoughts your thoughts." There are no lengths to which God will not go in order to save his people and though he will never force their minds, it is true, he is apparently ready to talk to each one of them, to take part in their discussions, to argue and convince so that no opportunity be lost. If Jeremiah can say without irreverence that God gets up very early in the morning to send prophets, and if God himself can accept the humiliation of being treated like a baby, then there are no limits to what he is prepared to do. The idea is thoroughly biblical, whether it is God saying to Israel, "Come now, let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18), or telling Agabus, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles" (Acts 21:11). However, as long as most of us continue to refer to the Holy Spirit as "it," we shall find the idea quite incomprehensible, very far-fetched, and sadly unspiritual.

### • THE SPIRIT IS POWER

It has been necessary to dwell on this idea at some length because it is so very characteristic of both the Fourth Gospel and the Acts and yet it is so entirely unexpected. However, the Holy Spirit's activities are not limited to this personal encounter and this is where one must disagree with the sort of teaching which suggests that the Holy Spirit is self-effacing. This is hardly the Biblical picture. Jesus speaks of him as "power" and John the Baptist equates him with "fire" (Luke 24:49; 3:16). Indeed, throughout the Bible his activities are extraordinarily explosive, whether it is when he drives the apostles out into the streets of Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost or when he enters the house of Cornelius at Caesarea.



After the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch at Gaza, the Spirit whisked Philip away from the scene so that the eunuch saw no more of him, "but Philip was found at Azotus" (Acts 8:39-40). This is not a purely New Testament phenomenon, but is to be seen consistently throughout the Bible, where the picture is constantly that of men and women doing things which they otherwise would not have done, saying things which they had never expected to say, and generally giving the impression that it is no longer they who are acting and speaking at all, but as if an exterior Power has somehow got hold of them and is using their bodies as a means of expressing himself.

Consequently, when the Spirit of God came upon Balaam, he said not what he was being paid to say, but what he could not help saying, and blessed the Israelites extravagantly, though he had been brought for the express purpose of cursing them (Num. 23, 24; see esp. 24:2). In the stories of the judges the explanation of their exploits is frequently that the Spirit had taken control, Othniel, Gideon, and Jephthah all being described in this way. Samson's great strength is ascribed to the same cause; it is not a quality which he possesses in his own right, but something which comes upon him from time to time. When this happens, then the results are astounding: "The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion asunder as one tears a kid. . . . The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the ropes which were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands" (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14). In the same way the Spirit used to "come mightily" upon Saul during the early years of his reign and cause him either to prophesy or rouse the tribes to come speedily to the defense of people who were in trouble (1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23). After David had been anointed to be king in Saul's place, "The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon

David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). It was the Spirit of the Lord who caused Elijah to perform the amazing feats of endurance for which he was apparently famous, so that when the hand of the Lord was upon him he ran faster than Ahab's chariot and reached Jezreel first. It will be remembered that both Obadiah and the sons of the prophets thought of Elijah as someone who went with startling suddenness from place to place under the driving force of the Spirit and might even get himself hurt in the process (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16). It was not only the great prophets and judges who were affected in this way, for the Spirit occasionally took hold of quite ordinary people. So it happened to Eldad and Medad, to Amasai, a captain in David's army, upon Azariah the son of Oded, and Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the Priest, none of whom are mentioned again in the Bible (Num. 11:26; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 15:1; 24:20).

This conception is continued in the prophets, notably in Ezekiel who speaks frequently of being compelled by the Spirit to do and say extraordinary things: "And he said to me, 'Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you.' And when he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet" (Ezek. 2:1-2), and later, "The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me, and I came to the exiles at Tel-abib" (3:14-15). (See also Ezek. 3:24; 8:3; 11:1, 5, 24; 36:27; 39:29; 43:5.) In the vision of the valley of dry bones it is the Spirit of God who takes him up and sets him down in the midst of the valley and it is not until God puts his Spirit in the recreated people that they shall live (37:1-14). This idea of the power of the Spirit is not confined to Ezekiel, where admittedly, it takes sometimes a rather exotic form, but is found also in the other prophets. Thus Isaiah speaks of the

Lord of Hosts being "a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate" (Isa. 28:6). In Joel's famous prophecy which Peter held to have been fulfilled at Pentecost, the Spirit is to be poured out even on the slaves with startling results (Joel 2:28-29). Micah says that he is filled with power by the Spirit of the Lord (Mic. 3:8) and the word of the Lord to Zerubabel was, "Not by might, nor by power (i.e. earthly power), but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

In the West today we are inclined to think of these tremendous manifestations of the Spirit as rather ugly, almost bad manners. However, we have already seen that there was nothing calm about what the still, small voice told Elijah to go and do, when he fled to the mountain of God at Horeb. Nor was there anything in the very least calm about what Paul said to Elymas when he was filled with the Holy Spirit, for he called him, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of deceit and villainy" (Acts 13:10). We make a very great mistake, therefore, if we imagine that when we are filled with the Spirit we are likely to continue behaving in the calm and collected manner of perfect gentlemen. The evidence, in fact, is quite to the contrary.

### • THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

The activity of the Spirit, moreover, is essentially unpredictable and it is almost true to say that the one thing which we can be sure of is that he will never act in quite the way we expect him to act. Once more we must remind ourselves that God's ways are not our ways. This activity is not only unpredictable; it is also quite incomprehensible to the world which sees the activity transposed, as it were, from the greater dimension into the less. Imagine, if you can, for a moment, a boy growing up in some backward country, a boy who has never seen or heard an orchestra, or indeed any musical instru-

ment, until one day he visits the house of another person who possesses a piano. This person plays to him on the piano the arrangement of some orchestral piece, but explains as he does so that the notes on the piano really represent different instruments in the orchestra, the same note having to stand for the sounds made by a flute, a violin, a clarinet, a glockenspiel, and so on. The boy is likely to think that this is mere nonsense, for he has no experience of the greater dimension and therefore cannot make the connection. To him the same note remains the same note all the time. In the same way, I remember seeing a small Bedouin boy in Palestine looking for a long time at a photograph in an illustrated magazine without realizing that it was meant to represent someone's face. Little by little he pieced it out, saying slowly to himself, "That's an eye and that's another eye, and that's a nose and that's a mouth—why, it's a face!" It was the first time he had ever experienced the transposition from a greater dimension to a lesser and he could not understand that it was possible.

This is what happens when the Spirit acts among men and women. The Holy Spirit belongs to the real, true world which is outside this universe and when he acts within the universe he is forced to make use of the ordinary physical characteristics of this universe in order to be seen at all. However, these physical characteristics are in normal, daily use for perfectly ordinary worldly things and so, when they are used by the Holy Spirit, it is quite impossible to explain to someone who has never experienced the Spirit's activities that anything different is happening from what he is used to seeing quite normally in his daily life. To him it looks just the same and if there should be anything odd about it, he gives it the same worldly explanation which would have explained the oddness quite correctly if it had been purely worldly. Consequently, there is for him very little apparent difference between possession by the Holy Spirit and madness, or at the very least



drunkenness, and these are the explanations which the worldly give. When the prophet came to anoint Jehu, his fellow-officers asked him what "this mad fellow" wanted (2 Kings 9:11), and Hosea says bluntly, "The man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred" (Hos. 9:7), meaning by that, as the next verse shows, not that he has been driven into insanity by the people's behavior, but that the people's iniquity was such that God had sent them prophets who, when they prophesied, acted like madmen. Similarly, when the Spirit descends on the apostles at Pentecost the crowd say that they are drunk (Acts 2:13).

It follows that if we receive the Spirit, if we accept his direction, we are likely to go where we never expected and do what we never intended. He will take hold of us and overpower us and use us for our own good and the good of our fellowmen, whether we like the process or not. We may find ourselves slaving away in a downtown parish, enduring the frustrations and tensions of the mission field, trying desperately to bear witness in the blackboard jungle, or facing the pressures and barrage of opposition which a life in politics involves. We are bound to say from time to time with Jeremiah, "Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land!" (Jer. 15:10).

A church which is possessed by the Spirit will be full of such people and there will be explosions and inevitable strains and stresses. It cannot be expected that congregations who have been shielded from any disturbance and who have been encouraged always to go to church for comfort and encouragement are going to take kindly to the dynamic power of the Spirit, who, it must never be forgotten, is God, the very power who sustains the universe. When he fills the temple, the foundations of the threshold are shaken. He will not quench a smoking flax, but he will never spare the complacent.

When he has done his work, when the whole community has accepted him, then the fruits of the Spirit are seen. The members are bound together in the unity of the Spirit, and love and joy and peace are part of their life together. That is also his work—to rouse the complacent, to set the faithful on fire, to preach good tidings to the poor, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and to bind together the individuals into the Body of Christ where they belong. It will not have escaped your notice, surely, that Paul's magnificent description of true Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13 comes right in the middle of a discussion of the work of the Spirit.

#### • OVER-EMPHASIS ON THE SPIRIT

It would seem that we are getting very near saying, "This is it; this is the fundamental thing, the ultimate truth beside which all else is relative. If only a church can be filled with the Spirit, then all will be well." But this is not true. You may, of course, argue that if the Spirit is God himself, then to be possessed and used by the Spirit is indeed all that is required, but this is not so, for in fact, if we examine the Church of God, we find that over-emphasis upon the Spirit produces the same curious results which we have seen were produced by over-emphasis upon either faith or the Body of Christ. It is not merely that there is over-development of one side of the Church's nature and therefore neglect of other important things, producing that ugly lack of balance which was so abhorrent to the Greeks, but actually that the church which over-emphasizes the Spirit is seen by those outside it to be denying the Spirit.

It is not just that the holiness sects display a lack of discipline, an excess of emotionalism, and a neglect of intellectual restraint. These things are to be expected and are themselves a challenge to those churches whose organization is more formal. It is rather that those churches which have come into

being in the first place because their members cannot be bound by the clogging shackles of institutionalized religion become themselves religious institutions so rigid in their form that all future explosions of the Spirit must take place outside them. The very churches which rebelled against sectarianism, and which give themselves names which emphasize this, not only create new sects merely by coming into being, but tend to form the kind of sects which are most likely to break again when disagreements arise within them. The people who lay most claim to possession of the Spirit are not, in the eyes of the outside world, most notable for their charity, and the censoriousness of these holiness sects is in some quarters a byword. Those who by their own profession should of all others be guided by the Spirit into all truth are the least prepared to recognize truth outside themselves. It was in fact of the Corinthians, a church very clearly of this nature, that Paul asked the question, "What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?" (1 Cor. 14:36). This paragraph is, of course, a generalization and the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army are a standing argument against generalizations. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny the statement that it is not on the whole among the sects which lay most stress upon the Spirit that the unity of the Spirit is most evidently seen.

It is easy, of course, to condemn the holiness groups if we ourselves belong to one of the historic churches, for it is always so very easy to see the weaknesses in other people. Yet we should surely be rebuked by them, and not merely by their drive and enthusiasm, but by the very fact that they exist, by the fact that they follow not with us. Protestantism in this country today, and in this category one must for the moment include the Episcopal Church, is so very respectable. It moves upon its ordered course in peace and prosperity. It is certainly vigorous and growing in numbers greatly, but it is

sadly lacking in explosions, and as one moves from the solemn ritual of the Episcopalians, or the equally solemn ritual of not having a ritual practiced by the Methodists or Presbyterians, to the vulgar disorder of the storefront church a couple of blocks away, one is bound to wonder whether in a sense it is not the last which comes nearest to the excited communities of the early Christian days.

Yet, though we may not condemn them, and must, perhaps, respect them, one is bound to confess that they share with us the same inherent weakness of denying the very thing which they believe in most. This is almost a law in our members, that we deny before men the very thing which we would be ready to give our lives to defend. It is a tragic situation, a paradox in the heart of the Church, and it is to why this should be so that we must now turn our attention.



## 8

ISAIAH 45:1-13    ACTS 1:7-8  
1 CORINTHIANS 1-4

It has become clear in the last three chapters that, at the

very least, there are three marks of the true Church, each of which is quite fundamental to any biblical conception of what the Church is and what it does, and that since the time of the Reformation there has been a tendency for each one of the historic churches to lay more emphasis upon one of these marks than upon the others and, in the disputes which have developed among them, to appeal to a different authority in support of their point of view. So it has been that the churches of what we may, for convenience, call the "catholic" persuasion have tended to insist that the essential mark of the Church, the thing that marks it out as different from other societies here on earth is that it is not, in a worldly sense, a society at all. Rather, it is the Body of Christ, an organic whole with a reality and a life of its own which is, in fact, the life of Christ himself. It is not a thing to which one belongs or does not belong purely as a matter of choice, but it is a living thing of which one either is, or is not, a part. Therefore, this living Church is itself the final authority and in any dispute one must appeal to what the Church teaches.

In revolt against what they felt to be the excesses of over-emphasis upon this point of view the Reformers appealed from the authority of the Church to the Bible, the Word of God. This was final, they said, and in the last resort the Church itself must be judged by this standard, for what is really basic to the Church is that it is a community of people who by God's infinite mercy, and through no actions of their own, have been saved. To belong to the Church is to belong to these people and the essential mark of the Church, therefore, is that they should be a people among whom this tremendous truth is constantly set forth and who place their whole trust in this one thing, which is set down in the pages of God's Holy Word, that while they were yet sinners Christ died for them.

The third group consists of those who have said, in effect,

“If you read the New Testament, you will see that what marks out the Church as different from all other societies is that it consists of people who have received the Holy Spirit. It is quite clear that the Church could not even begin until this had happened and it is equally clear from the New Testament that the coming of the Holy Spirit produces remarkable effects in those to whom he comes. The Holy Spirit himself, therefore, is the final authority. It is he who interprets the words of Holy Scripture for every individual and where he is not obviously present the church is a church only in name.”

It is necessary to make quite clear that we are not attempting in the very least to make an interesting study of the denominational differences within the Church, but to try to discover what the true marks of the Church are, what its essential character is. It seems clear from a study of the Bible that, whatever other marks the Church may have, these three are by all the evidence essential. However, we cannot dissociate ourselves entirely from the Church as it now appears, and within this divided Church of today it seems that these three marks are given different emphasis by different groups. This is not to say for one moment that all the major groups within the Church do not accept all these three as of vast importance. We should be very wrong indeed if we imagined that the Lutherans, for example, attached little importance to the sacraments, because of their emphasis upon faith and the preaching of the Word, or that the Roman Catholics or the Episcopalians, because they stress the Church as the Body of Christ, therefore regard the Bible as a minor matter. That would be quite, quite untrue. The more thinking members of all groups within the Church would never accept that any one of these three is of minor importance. However, we have to admit an undoubted tendency in every group to pay rather more attention to one of the three than to the others and to slip into thinking that in the final an-

alysis, if they had to put their finger on the real fundamental, then they would put their finger on that one.

Now, the fact that each one of these marks is a true mark of the Church, regarded as an essential characteristic from the beginning, would suggest that there is really no harm in emphasizing it, for after all it is the truth. If one branch of the Church emphasizes one somewhat more than the others, it would mean, perhaps, a certain lack of balance, which would be a pity, but it would not be a disaster, because the other essential characteristics were getting extra emphasis elsewhere. In the long run, therefore, no part of the truth would be neglected. This, it would seem, is the sensible way of looking at the matter. However, if the argument of the last three chapters has had any measure of truth in it, it is just this which does not happen in actual fact. Not only is it true, as one might expect, that some parts of the truth are a little neglected in certain groups, but it is also true that they are not given their proper emphasis elsewhere. Indeed, the moment that a Christian group starts emphasizing one side of the truth, a side which they feel, perhaps, is being somewhat neglected by the other groups, then they cease, in some curious way, to witness to that side of the truth in any *effective fashion*. It is not that they do not witness to the truth, but that their witness is ineffective, for though they are perfectly, and indeed rightly, convinced of it themselves, and bring up all their members in the same conviction, they fail to convince other people of its importance, the very people, that is, who stand most in need of having it brought to their attention. In fact, it is worse than that, for while they never fail to speak about that side of the truth which they see so clearly and to proclaim it, both in the pulpit and in books, yet the life of that group seems again and again to be contradicting what they are saying.

Make no mistake. It is not a question here of a group of



Christian people doing what, alas, all Christian people do, that is, failing to live up to the standards they teach, in other words, of not practicing what they preach. It is a question of doing apparently the very opposite of what they preach, of denying by their life the very thing which they are most anxious shall never at any time be denied. This is what in the course of our study has become evident as the dilemma of the Church today.

### • THE REASON FOR THIS PARADOX

We are probably more likely to find the explanation of this dilemma if we turn back again to the definition of the Church as the People of God, upon which the whole argument of this book has been based, that it is the channel for God's revelation of himself, as existing, that is, in order that through their words, their actions, and their life men may see God. This is the sole justification of all that they do. However, the question arises for the Church of what kind of God does in fact reveal himself through this Church which he has brought into being. It is apparently not enough to say that he reveals himself as infinite, unlimited, absolute power, as unvarying righteousness, as unfailing mercy, as pure holiness, or as sheer love. Quite early in the history of the Church it was found necessary to put forward a different kind of definition which would help to explain what was happening and who it was that was being made known through them. This definition is that which we know today as the doctrine of the Trinity, in which it is stated that though there is only one God, yet he is somehow not just one but three persons to whom we give the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the document known as the Athanasian Creed, which is one of the classic statements of this doctrine, it is said that the Christian faith is this: "that we worship one God in Trinity, and the Trin-

ity in Unity; neither confusing the Persons, nor dividing the substance." By this is meant that we must not conveniently split up God into three quite separate gods, even if they all remain quite equal to each other, nor must we be so insistent upon the idea of one God that we lose sight altogether of this distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The statement then goes on, after a lengthy explanation of the characteristics of each person, to say, "There is therefore one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts," and at this point the casual reader, if indeed he has got so far, is likely to remark, "Well, of all things! Who ever thought there were?"

Naturally, nobody is likely to embark upon an explanation of the Christian faith by saying, "Well, you see the idea of the Trinity means that there are three Fathers; in fact, each Person of the Trinity is really God the Father." So unlikely is the Christian to make such a statement of belief that this verse in the Athanasian Creed looks more than usually like something which early Church fathers put in just to make it more difficult, as the modern church-goer sometimes suspects them of having done at least half of the time. However, the writers of the creeds were certainly not trying to make things difficult; they were trying to make them easy, to set down in words as clear a statement as they could produce of what their experience of God added up to, and what they produced was the doctrine of the Trinity. The statement was not an account of what they had worked out philosophically that God must be like, but an account of what, as a result of his having revealed himself to them, they knew him to be. The creeds are in no sense, therefore, an intellectual exercise but a statement of experience and are bound to remain directly related to man's experience.

Now, the ordinary man is quite unable to conceive of the

Trinity. God may reveal himself to be of this nature, but the men to whom he reveals himself, even when they do achieve some recognition of a division of Persons, have the greatest difficulty in thinking of them as "co-eternal" together, and "co-equal," which is how they are told they ought to be thinking. Instead, there is inevitably one Person whom they manage to see rather more clearly, one Person, whom, so to speak, they manage to bring more clearly into focus in their minds, and since the thought of more than one God is abhorrent to them, they tend to impose a unity by viewing all the Persons as replicas of the one they see most clearly. Thus, in effect, for they would never dream of saying so, their idea of the Trinity is really one in which are three Fathers, or possibly three Sons or three Holy Spirits. This may sound very complicated and even unnecessarily abstruse, but we have to remember that what has gone wrong is likely to be complicated and abstruse. It would involve taking a quite stupidly superficial view of the Church if we were to imagine the error is something really quite simple and that therefore Christians are being very silly and slipshod in not taking the trouble to put it right. It is only just to the churches to believe that they really want to be loyal to God and that if their failure to do so was the result of an obvious defect, they would certainly do something about putting it right.

We are, therefore, faced with the possibility that what has gone wrong is that the churches have unconsciously moved into holding a lop-sided view of the Trinity and holding a theology which, whatever it may be in words, is in effect *Father-dominated*, or *Son-dominated*, or *Spirit-dominated* and that as a result of this they tend to think of God as requiring from them only one kind of response. It would perhaps be easier to understand the whole problem if we remembered more often than we do that what God is like is never a purely abstract matter, a question which can safely

be left to the eggheads at the seminaries. It is always true that every time God reveals himself to men, he expects them to do something about it, to respond to his revelation. If, therefore, God reveals himself as possessing this threefold character, then it must mean that what is being demanded of us is a threefold response. When we learn something about God, we can never sit back and say, "Well, that is very interesting, but what has it got to do with us?" The answer of the Bible is quite consistently from beginning to end that it has got everything to do with us, because for the purposes of our salvation we are expected to fit in somehow with what God is like. Thus John, in explaining why we ought to love one another, points out that it started with God's revelation of himself. "In this is love," he says, "not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:10-11).

#### • THE RESPONSE TO THE FATHER

In these terms, therefore, it is possible to see faith as what we may call the "Father-response," for it is the proper attitude of the clay to the potter, of creation to its Creator, the willing acceptance that he has made them and that they are his, that he may do with them whatever he likes and that whatever he does choose to do with them is for the best. Once we accept the fact that God is our Creator, then we are driven into the necessity of making such a response, because any other response would be merely absurd. This is what Jeremiah meant when he said, "I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he re-worked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. "Then the word of the Lord came to me: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this



potter has done?' says the Lord. 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel' " (Jer. 18:3-6). The same argument is used by Paul in his letter to the Romans, when he asks, "Who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me thus?' Has the potter no right over the clay?" (Rom. 9:20-21). It had been used much earlier by Isaiah also, when he was blaming the Assyrians for being so conceited as to imagine that it was by their might and power that they had achieved their victories: "Shall the ax vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!" (Isa. 10:15). "Woe to him who strives with his Maker," said the unknown Prophet of the Exile, "an earthen vessel with the potter! Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: 'Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands? I made the earth, and created man upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host!' " (Isa. 45:9, 11).

Carried to its logical conclusion this response, which is the only response that a created thing can make to its Creator, should lead to the realization that not only is any created thing helpless in its Creator's hands, but if the Creator is all-knowing—as he must be—then he must know in advance exactly what he is going to do with all the things he has made. This is, in fact, the Muslim view. Strictly speaking, the Muslim will not admit that men can talk about doing the will of God or not doing it, because so helpless are they in his hands that it is nonsense to think of their doing anything else except his will. God knows in advance whom he has chosen to go to heaven and whom he has destined for hell, and there is no escape from this

decision because man has got no power at all with regard to his Creator. It is not surprising that the tremendous emphasis which was laid upon faith at the time of the Reformation led some of the Reformers into an attitude which was not unlike this, and as a result many of the statements of some of the early Calvinists concerning man's relation to God could have been said perfectly easily by a good Muslim.

What is very curious about an immense amount of Protestant thought in the West is that it lays this emphasis upon faith, and appeals (very much as a Muslim might do) to "the Book" as its final authority, and is, therefore, insisting upon the proper response of the creature to its Creator, and yet it has a curiously weak conception of the Creator. The Protestants in this country do not read the Old Testament a great deal, and yet the response which is being demanded of them is essentially an Old Testament response. Their emphasis, both in their preaching and in their writing, has tended again and again to be on Jesus Christ to the exclusion, very nearly, of anything else. They have a tendency to talk as if it were possible to substitute the term "Christ" for "God, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ," which is the New Testament expression, as if the words Christ and God were completely interchangeable. But this is not so. The meaning of the incarnation, that God should be prepared to become man, is entirely non-existent, except in terms of a Creator and his creation, and it may be true that the weakness of so much modern Protestant theology in this country in the years between the wars is largely due to the fact that they were, so to speak, trying to make the right response to the wrong Person. Their belief was in Christ, but the nature of the correct Protestant belief has always been this utter dependence and absolute trust, which we make most properly when we realize that we are but clay in the hands of the potter. It is, in fact, the "Father-response," and

the truth of this is being made apparent today by the manner in which Protestant writers are struggling to rouse the American public to grasp that God is an active and powerful Creator.

### • THE RESPONSE TO THE SON

The proper response to Christ, that is, the real "Son-response," is surely of rather a different nature, and that there is something more to the relationship of man to God than that of mere clay in the Potter's hands, is foreshadowed in the Old Testament itself. It is surprising that though the Old Testament was entirely written in the days before Christ came, in days, that is, when the whole emphasis was upon the Almighty Creator, when his power and his majesty and his glory were constantly being driven home by lesson after lesson, there is actually curiously little of the type of teaching which insists that men are as much at the mercy of God as the clay in the hands of the potter. There are, it is true, the verses that have already been quoted, but when one compares the Old Testament with the Koran, in which this type of thinking is quite fundamental, one must be struck by the relative absence of it in the Old Testament. It suggests that from quite early on it was realized that man is clay in God's hands, yet that is not the way in which God treats him. It was, in fact, a matter of wonder to the psalmist that God should treat man as something other than clay, and should even give him a place of importance and responsibility within his creation: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:4-5).

The purpose of God for man is made known with the coming of Christ into the world, for part of the tremendous importance of the incarnation is that it brings man clearly

into the picture as no longer merely clay in the hands of the Potter. Man now appears (though always, of course, by God's grace and never by virtue of anything that man himself has done) as being someone whose nature God is not ashamed to take upon himself and whom he is willing and anxious to save, despite his utter unworthiness. The proper response to this can only be to accept it and to enter into it. If in what happened in Palestine two thousand years ago God showed himself ready to come and dwell with men, to live among them, to give his life for them, and not only for them but actually to them, then we can do nothing other than receive this life and hand ourselves over that we may be drawn into this fellowship; we must allow ourselves to be the branches on the vine, and to draw our strength through the continuing sacramental life of the Church, which has this character not only in the sense that in the Church the sacraments are celebrated, but also in the sense that the life of the Church itself is sacramental. That is to say that the Church partakes of this double nature of being material and spiritual at the same time, and has a continuing life which cannot be relegated conveniently to the spiritual sphere, but which is an organic reality maintained through time as well as through space.

Those who have been brought up in this "catholic" conception of the Church have a wonderful sense of security, for they have this knowledge that baptism is more than a symbol; it is a reality, and that when they were baptized they were firmly attached to the vine and made part of this solid, living reality. This gives them a sure and certain feeling that they belong and that, because of this, they are free. They never have to worry whether they are accepted or not; it does not matter if they are eccentric, if they do things which cause them to be outcasts from the secular community, as Christians from time to time have been called to do, because their



relationship with Jesus Christ himself and with all the other members of his Church, both on earth and in heaven, is real and unbreakable. This is of no small importance, for the Church owes much to its "oddities," to those eccentrics who have been prepared to be quite disreputable from the point of view of the world, and very often also from the point of their fellow-Christians. But they could afford to be disreputable, because it never occurred either to them or to their disapproving fellows that by their behavior they could ever cut themselves off from the Church. That for them was always something unalterable and solid.

This explains a matter which seems such a curious puzzle to many Protestant Americans—why the Church of England does nothing about the "Red Dean." The answer is that they do nothing because there is nothing that they can do. It is not merely that people do not want to penalize a man for his political opinions, even though they believe these opinions to be very peculiar and possibly very dangerous; it is rather that political opinions have nothing whatsoever to do with being a member of the Church. He remains a sure and certain member of the Church whatever he may do and think politically, and, therefore, to prevent the "Red Dean" fulfilling his office within the Church because of his political opinions would not be discrimination or persecution, as it might be if a secular body were to take action against him; it would be a flat contradiction of what the Church is—the Body of Christ.

Over-emphasis upon this response to the Son has its dangers, of course, for there is always the possibility that while we remember that the continuing life of the Church is true and assured we may forget the necessity of making a response to the Father, of admitting, that is, that we are but clay in the hands of the Potter, and that what he has given us he can equally well take away. It has also the danger

that just because with the coming of Christ man has been placed firmly in the middle of the picture as something more than clay in the Potter's hands, we may begin to think that there is something which man can do by himself. The medieval teaching about works, against which the Reformers revolted so strongly, is an illustration of this.

### • THE RESPONSE TO THE SPIRIT

The third response which is required is that to the Holy Spirit, which was discussed in the last chapter, and it is so much more clearly a response to the third Person of the Trinity, that it does not need a great deal of further discussion here. It is another correction to what may happen if we concentrate too much upon the life of the community, for while it never ceases to be true that it is impossible to be separated by anything which we do from the Body of Christ to which we belong, yet it is equally true that each one of us stands alone before God, utterly and completely alone, face to face with him and answerable to him for every action. Christ left us in no doubt about this. "I tell you," he said to the Pharisees, "on the day of judgment men will render an account for every careless word they utter" (Matt. 12:36). Therefore, although we are quite solidly members one of another, we may never take refuge in this fact. There is no escape from the searching penetration of the Holy Spirit. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?" asks the psalmist, "or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139:7). Consequently, my proper response to the Spirit must be both to accept this responsibility, to seek to lay the blame nowhere else but where it squarely belongs—upon myself, and also to recognize that it is through individuals that the Spirit acts, galvanizing into unwonted activity separate human beings. I am required to lay myself open to this dynamic power, cost what it may in suffering and distress of mind, and I

must steadily and readily admit that the Spirit works through other individuals as well. If, therefore, I have not allowed him to work through me, there is every chance that I will not recognize him when he is at work in others. Thus a man may not particularly like Billy Graham, shall we say, but he must recognize that there is no *a priori* reason why the Holy Spirit should not work through such people; he must, it is true, test the spirits whether they be of God, but he must not rule out the possibility that God is working even through what seem to him the most unlikely individuals.

In a purely Spirit-dominated group this often leads to individualism and fragmentation, but this should not happen, for it was the clear conviction of the early Christians that one of the results of the activity of the Spirit was unity.

#### • THE RESPONSE TO THE TRINITY

This idea that man has a threefold responsibility to respond to God, as part of creation, as a member of the community, and as a solitary individual, and that in making this threefold response he is responding to the threefold character of the God who made him, must surely also mean that in making anything less than this triple response he is likely to be denying in some way the true nature of God. It will follow that if any section of the Church tends to make a single rather than a threefold response, it will be found that it is actually contradicting the character of God.

To discover why this is so, it is necessary to turn to the Fourth Gospel and the First Letter of John, where the nature of God receives its fullest consideration in the pages of the New Testament. "The Spirit," says John, "is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth," but the Spirit does not witness to himself; rather he receives from the Father and glorifies the Son. The Spirit "will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak. . . . He will

glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (1 John 5:7; John 16:13-14). In the same way Christ says of himself, that is, of the Son, "I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true" (John 5:30-31). The Son seeks to glorify the Father and this is the purpose for which he came (John 12:28) and the Father glorifies the Son (John 17:1) and bears witness to him rather than to himself (John 5:37). What is happening is that God must of his very nature require the worship and glory of men, because he is so much more glorious than they, and yet it is also of his nature to deny himself, and therefore, it must never be *for himself* that this glory is sought. This dilemma can be resolved only because within himself, so to speak, God is always denying himself and seeking the glory of Another.

Now, this could be nothing but a fascinating intellectual argument, the result of some learned theologian sitting in his study and saying after profound contemplation, "This is what God must be like; no other possibility will really satisfy the requirements." But if that were all, then ordinary people like you and me would have every justification for replying, "So what? What has that got to do with us and how do you know, anyway?" However, when it is found to correspond with our own experience, when we find that bearing witness to only one part of the truth involves us in actually contradicting that part of the truth, we are driven to say, "If we are going to bear witness to God at all, if we are going so to live and act that God may be seen through us, then we have got to live and act like this." There must, in other words, be this same interplay of activity which is the life of God. What we are forced to realize is that our intense and devoted loyalty to one part of the truth, which, as



we have seen, is a response to one Person of the Trinity, cannot be anything else than disloyalty to that Person because he himself is glorifying the Other. This may sound very complicated and theological, but it is surely somewhere on this deep level that the true nature of the People of God is to be found.

It would surely follow from this that unity is an essential mark of the Church as true and valid as any of the other marks and that this can only mean a condemnation of separate denominations. It is not that what is wanted is a dull uniformity, but the variety that we have at present involves a confrontation and an opposition from without, rather than the creative interplay from within, which is the true nature of the Trinity, each seeking the glory of the other. We can no more properly say, "I am of Luther; I am of Calvin; I am of Canterbury; I am of Rome," than the Corinthians could properly say, "I am of Apollos; I am of Paul." It should be noted that Paul's reason for denouncing this division was not that Christians ought not to be divided, but that *Christ* is not divided (1 Cor. 1:13).

If this is so, then it would seem likely that an over-emphasis upon unity would deny that unity, just as the over-emphasis upon any other mark of the Church denied that very part of the truth, and this appears to be true. There is a kind of spurious unity, a superficial inter-denominationalism, which is really a denial of unity because it dares not discuss our divisions. It lays such emphasis upon unity and regards it as being in the final analysis the most important thing, and yet it suggests to the world that the Church is not really one because it suggests that if the difference were thoroughly argued out the Church must break into pieces.

But what does all this involve? This could be the subject of many other books, and here it is possible to make only one or two suggestions of what should be our next steps.

(1) We should have a steadfast resolve that the visible unity of the Body of Christ must be restored "that the world may know," and should offer endless prayer that God may bring this about.

(2) We must plunge into our own denominations. It is only from a position of sound understanding and a sincere spiritual life that we can speak. We should remember that if our position has validity, it is the truth, and it is only on a basis of truth that we can make our encounter with truth.

(3) We must not be afraid of one world-wide organization, or indeed of any other possible form that the "coming Great Church" may take. To be afraid is in itself to take refuge in a false security. We cannot see now what form the Church of God may take, but we must trust that that form into which God shall direct us is the only effective form.

(4) We must never lose sight of the fact that the steps towards unity may well present themselves to us as the sacrifice of all that we hold most dear. That was how God's will was presented to Abraham and the fact that he did not refuse it was counted to him for righteousness. We can expect no other kind of righteousness.

(5) If it is God's will at this present time that his Church shall be reunited, then nothing is so holy that he will allow it to stand in his way.

(6) The Church today is faced with a world under the judgment of God, a world which is making tremendous demands upon the Church, which only a united Church can face. It is not, essentially *not*, a question of a more effective organization which would result from our unity, but of the power of the Spirit. We must not impose limits other than those which God himself has appointed.

These are but pointers, briefly noted, but it is difficult to believe that they are not at any rate some of the principles which the Bible itself would establish for our further progress.

THE EYES OF THE LORD  
RUN TO AND FRO

2 CHRONICLES 7:11-22    ISAIAH 29:1-16  
DANIEL 3:8-30; 9:1-19  
LUKE 21:10-36    ROMANS 8:31-39

• IF THESE THINGS are true for the Church of God, what then do they mean for those other groups of which we have spoken, the nation and the community of learning? First of all, what cannot be forgiven is any thought that all this may be interesting, but that it is remote and not of immediate concern. Such an attitude is in itself a denial of God who says, in the words of the prophet Zephaniah, "I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are thickening upon their lees, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.' Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them" (Zeph. 1:12-13). It is fundamental to all Christian thinking that whether as members of the Christian Church, or as members of any other group at all, we are first and foremost part of the creation of God, and there is nothing that we can do or say in opposition to him. The shattering question with which God humbled Job is still the same question for us: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you

when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:2-4). In the face of the overwhelming power and might and majesty of God there is nothing at all that we can say other than what Daniel said, "To us, O Lord, belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers" (Dan. 9:8).

It is difficult to think of any idea to which the modern Western mind is more resistant than this, that we are utterly in the hands of God and that he can do with us what he will. We have achieved such control of some parts of the physical world that we are inclined to think and act as if some day, perhaps in the very distant future it is true, complete and effective mastery will be within the grasp of men. In fact, our modern way of life very nearly demands that we shall act upon such an assumption. To admit, even secretly within ourselves, that there may be some areas within which no form of control by men is possible would seem to be a failure of nerve which must, sooner or later, cripple and stultify the restless search by men for knowledge. It is held intolerable for men possessed of the true scientific urge that they should be told at any point, "These are questions which you must not ask."

A great many good Christian people do take this line. They say that scientific inquiry is impious because it pries into things which are very much better kept secret, and they would say today, for example, that atomic research is wrong, because it seeks to discover what ought not to be known. It is certainly true that, as far as we can see at the moment, men have tended to use the knowledge gained from this research rather for evil than for good, but it is very doubtful whether a Christian can say that the knowledge itself is evil. This would surely mean that what we were saying was that God himself is not wholly good, that some parts of the universe which he has created are bad and will do us harm if we come to know about them. This is in flat contradiction



to biblical thought, which maintains that the material world is good, because it has been made by God. What God has made cannot be evil, because God's whole nature is to do what is good.

Nor can the Christian consider the control of the physical world by man to be evil, because that is what man is made for. "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet," says the psalmist (Ps. 8:6), and in the second chapter of Genesis we are told that God brought the beasts of the field to the man to see what he would call them, "and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (Gen. 2:19), which would mean in the thinking of the time that man had been given the mastery of the beasts.

Neither the knowledge nor the mastery are evil in themselves. Where we have gone wrong is to think and act as if both the knowledge and mastery were ours as of right, and that for this reason we should be bound to have some day absolute knowledge and absolute mastery. The truth is that both knowledge and power belong to God and not to us; if we have any measure of either, it is because God has entrusted them to us, and we shall therefore have to render account to him in the end of the use that we have made of them. We are not wrong to seek to know, even to seek to know all things, nor are we wrong to seek to control the world in which we live, but we are wrong to assume that the knowledge and the mastery which we acquire therefore belong to us. What we forget is that God is active, effective, and interested; it is of concern to him that the things which he has made should be used in the manner for which he has made them. We cannot escape this responsibility of knowledge; we must not act as if our increasing knowledge and power relieved us of the necessity of answering to God for the use we make of his creation. We are ourselves part

of the creation and cannot, therefore, do just what we like.

Not only have we no right to act in this fashion, but it is beyond measure foolish, because if the idea of creation has any reality at all, it must mean that the only system which can possibly be effective is that which is in accordance with the designs of the Creator. This does not mean that we have to look for different systems for the three different groups to which we belong, because it is God's nature to be *One* and thus all that he has made has this character of oneness. To a very large extent this is what we mean when we say that God is righteous, since everything that God does has the absolute directness, purity, and unity of a perfectly straight line. All that he has made has this character.

Now, this absolute perfection and unity of God's nature has a very important result: anything which is not in accordance with it must be wrong, must therefore be ineffective. When you set out to join A and B by a straight line, there are only two possibilities before you: either the line you draw is straight or it is not. Even the slightest shaking of your hand as you draw produces at once a line which is *not straight*, a line that is wrong and ineffective. Nothing you can do or say will alter this. Nothing at all in this whole wide world can make it a straight line, except only if you rub it out and draw it again.

From this it follows that throughout the whole of the universe (for there is no part of God's creation where his writ does not run) there can be only one effective way of life, and that is the way of righteousness, of unity with the purposes and nature of God. Not even God himself can alter this, because what is not right must be wrong. There is no third possibility. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him (2 Chron. 16:9).

This would be a terrible situation indeed, if it were not for

the fact that God has revealed himself, has made himself known, so that we may perceive and know what things we ought to do. But he has revealed himself as One whose method of working, from the very first moment of creation, is to deny himself, almost as it were to deny his very nature. Consequently, we are forced to the conclusion that, whatever appearances may suggest to the contrary, no other form of activity within his creation can, ultimately, be effective. And so, with every new evidence that we have that we are masters of this material world, we have to deny that this is so, we have to say, "The knowledge is not ours; we are not the masters." This is true, whether our power is that of the political or the intellectual sphere, whether, that is, we are acting as members of the nation or of the community of learning; we have always to remember that we are answerable to God for our actions. It is at one and the same time the most comforting and the most frightening thing about God that he is interested in what we do.

We are very inclined, most of us, to act as if this were true for our personal life, but not in wider spheres of action. Thus, when some form of activity within the nation is questioned—let us say when someone suggests that much of modern advertising is unchristian because it is designed to make us want to spend money on ourselves and to raise in us desires for material well-being which we did not have before, for example to make us want a T.V. set when we were getting along quite happily without one—the answer which is constantly given is, "But our economy depends on expanding markets. What you are suggesting just would not work here, for if we do not go on persuading people to buy things, even things they do not want, we shall have to cut down production and there will be widespread unemployment." Now, I am not arguing for the moment that this type of advertising is necessarily wrong. It may or may not be so,

though I confess that I find it difficult to fit it in with Christian principles. However, that is not the matter at issue. The point is that the kind of thinking which produces the answer is certainly wrong. It means that we do not really trust God, we do not believe that righteousness really works. Yet if God is master of his creation, he is master of it everywhere. There can be no sphere in which this does not apply, "for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth." To deny this can only mean that when it comes to the affairs of the nation we worship another god.

#### • MEMBERS OF A COMMUNITY

The second essential point is that we are not only part of creation; we are members of a community, bound to each other in a corporate group. What we have been discovering in this book is that at the very least we are members of three communities, each overlapping with the others, the Church, the nation, and the university. However, a very great many of us do not grasp this. We are apt to talk of "the Government" as if it were a curious group of people at Washington, with whom we have no very direct connection. Therefore, if "the Government" does something which we do not like, something perhaps which we may think of as actually wrong or unjust, such as maintaining a high tariff barrier, or not repealing the McCarran Act, or manufacturing hydrogen bombs, or whatever it is that disturbs us, we absolve ourselves of all responsibility by saying, "Of course, I don't agree with them at all," as if that meant that what they do had nothing to do with us and that we cannot be blamed for it. Now, in any case in a democracy it is questionable whether we ought to reason this way, because the members of the government are our representatives and are elected by the people. But it is not just this which is wrong. It is rather that in a community we are all bound to each other



and that therefore we are always involved in what the other members do and they are involved in what we do. To act as if we were in no sense responsible for the actions of the other members of the community is to divide the body.

This is true of the university world as well. We must not act as if there were two separate groups within the university, one called "faculty" and the other called the "students," each of which was entirely responsible for its own affairs. Students are rather given to this way of thinking, so that they feel they have no responsibility for the behavior of the faculty, except perhaps in so far as it concerns what they are pleased to call their "rights." But this kind of thinking is unchristian through and through. It may be necessary in this imperfect world to remind other people from time to time of what our rights are, but if this is the only thing of which we remind them, we have no real sense of what it means to belong to each other. If a man is a Christian, justice in any case is what he seeks for other people rather than for himself. His real concern should be, not to get his "rights," but to see that the community fulfils the function for which it was brought into being by God.

Now, the function of the university in the sight of God is surely the discovery and the publishing of truth, and anything which hinders this is to be condemned. But it is to be condemned by the whole community, and students therefore have a responsibility in the matter. If there is any validity in the suggestion made in the fourth chapter that the university today is being disloyal to the truth by its excessive departmentalization and by such things as its tendency to adopt the "multiple choice" type of examination, then the students who accept these things because they make life easier are equally to blame. We should make no mistake. The "multiple choice" type of examination is certainly easier both to answer and to grade than the type which involves

long written answers; and it is easier to study a subject if one is not forced to relate it to other subjects as well. Nevertheless, if such a thing as the "multiple choice" type of examination is unsound, which it may be, then the students themselves cannot be excused for not saying to the faculty, "We are not happy about being examined in a fashion which does not seem to us to do justice to the subject."

Very possibly you may object that this is not the kind of thing which students can say to teachers, and it may well be true that the faculty might not be very pleased to have it said to them. However, it is worth noting that the debate which has been proceeding for some time now in Britain about the true nature of the university and which has produced, among other things, Sir Walter Moberly's book, *The Crisis in the University*, owes its origin very largely to thinking done in the British Student Christian Movement and was sparked among the faculty in more than one center by the challenge which the Christian students openly made to them.

### • OUR DUTY AS INDIVIDUALS

Thirdly, we are individuals, each of us alone before God. This means that though we must not attempt to cut ourselves off from the community, yet we cannot be excused for merely following along with them. Whenever God wants truth made known to the world, he reveals it first to single people and lays upon them the responsibility of publishing it. This means that a Christian must resist with all that is in his power the pressure towards conformity which is very strong in certain university circles in this country, the suggestion that a man is in some way being disloyal to his group if he does not do as the others do. This kind of pressure is very largely a characteristic of student bodies, possibly rather especially in the smaller colleges, and it can produce much

unhappiness in those who are different and consequently feel that they are not accepted by the group.

Yet, of all religions, Christianity must insist upon the right, indeed very nearly upon the duty, of every man to be different. The Christian religion itself would never have come into being, it would have died at the outset, if there had not been a continual supply of men and women who dared to stand out absolutely alone against the crowd, even though they were killed because of it. The Christian faith, which, as we have seen, cannot be content with what is less than perfect, which must in fact regard what is less than perfect as wrong, demands that men shall go out as lonely pioneers for truth, shall challenge the accepted standards of a community, shall call upon them to repent, which means to change their way of living.

#### • WHAT MUST WE DO?

What all this is going to mean in terms of practical everyday living is beyond the scope of this book. It has to be worked out by each group of Christians wherever they find themselves. Certain possibilities, however, should be beginning to show themselves. It should be clear that within every one of the three communities which we have been discussing there is likely to be much that makes it difficult for men to see God and which, for that reason, Christians must oppose, and in this task students have one peculiar advantage: the mistakes which they make do not, in the worldly sense, matter very much. A student, when he leaves college, is able to make a new start. He can profit from what he has learned where it has been valuable, and he can also put behind him those things which have turned out to be foolish. A new student generation comes along very rapidly, so that even the student body itself is not harmed for more than a year or two by the mistakes which its members make.

This fact that students can afford to make mistakes means that they are much freer than anyone else to experiment. One of the tragedies of the McCarthyist way of thinking was that it held that men and women could be accounted responsible in later years for the mistakes they had committed as students, so that membership of an undesirable society while at the university was held against a person, even if he had given it up when he started to earn his own living. This is not to say, of course, that students ought to join undesirable societies—that would be ridiculous—but that the world at large should recognize that students have this inestimable advantage, that they are almost the only people in the country whose calling forces them to make a new start after a few years, and that therefore conformity while they are at college should not necessarily be counted as a virtue.

This can be seen clearly in the ecumenical movement, for the World Council of Churches is very largely made up of people who caught a glimpse while they were at college of the glory of a Church that was really one, and it would never let them rest. It is doubtful whether the World Council of Churches would ever have come into being, if it had not been for the driving force of two things, the challenge made by the missionaries abroad who said that in their efforts to preach one God they were hamstrung by the existence of a divided Church, and the compulsion of those who had experienced something of the character of one Church in the Student Christian Movements of their country and in the World's Student Christian Federation. This is not to say that they did not remain loyal and devoted members of their churches—the Student Christian Movement in Britain has produced most of present Anglican bishops in that country—but, because they had been free to experiment while they were students, they had been granted a vision of something more.



This raises the question, therefore, of whether it is right to perpetuate on the campus the pattern of the churches which is to be found in the nation as a whole, of whether denominational societies, Canterbury Clubs, and the rest of it, each ministering to the needs of its own members, are really the proper form of the Church for a community of students. Once again, it should be very clear that there is no suggestion here that students should pretend that the different churches do not exist, that they should cover up the divisions by a vague inter-denominationalism, by inter-faith services and other such denials of reality. A Christian student can no more contract out of the community of the Episcopal Church, or the Lutheran Church, or the Methodist Church, than he can contract out of any other community in which God has set him. Moreover, a neglect of differences cannot be for him, since above all things his duty is to study, to get to know what the facts are and to take account of them. What is being suggested, however, is that students, by the very nature of their calling, are the people upon whom has been laid the task of feeling towards something which may transcend our divisions. If they make mistakes, it will not be disastrous, but if God does reveal himself to them, then the whole world may be changed.

There is obviously a danger in this. Students, whatever they may like to think of themselves, are not the most knowledgeable people in the world. As things stand at the moment in this country they are particularly badly instructed in the beliefs and practices even of their own denominations, to say nothing of the others. They are also quite lamentably ignorant of the Bible. The chances are, therefore, that they will make the most crashing mistakes and be guilty of all sorts of questionable ecclesiastical practices. College chaplains, who, because of this, prefer to keep their students within their own fold have certainly very good reason for doing

so. Yet, where is there a beginning to be made with overcoming the scandal of our divisions, if it is not to be made here, where the mistakes that may be made are relatively of less importance than anywhere else?

Naturally, the fewer mistakes that are made the better, and all experiments will be valueless if the Christian student groups on the campuses are not ready to commit themselves to a long period, extending over many student generations, of study, both of the Bible and of the Christian faith. The knowledge and the understanding which is needed will not come easily.

Perhaps the real test of whether we are on the right track is likely to be the presence or absence of tension. If all is sweetness and light and everything is easy going, then we can be quite certain that we are wrong. If anyone has truly been granted a vision of some part of the truth which God requires to be made known, he will find himself, as it were, holding hands with two people, each of whom is tugging at his arm to go in another direction. There will be those of his own community who do not agree with him and those who do; there will be those of his own denomination and those of another; there will be the community of the Church and the community of the nation—again and again he will find himself in this position. If he does, chances are that he is fulfilling his calling as a Christian, but he must cling on with both hands at once. Even at the risk of being torn in two, he must not let go.

#### • THE SITUATION IS URGENT

What is beyond doubt is that the matter is urgent. Wherever we find ourselves able to begin, the demand for a re-examination of our way of life and for its reform is one which no student can neglect. It is almost trite to say that we live in a world of revolution, but it cannot be said too

often. All around us whole continents are tormented and the peoples that inhabit them are being swept into a future whose nature they cannot even imagine. Here, in the United States, the full force of this tumult has so far not touched us, though the students today live already in a situation very different from that which their fathers knew. There is no guarantee at all that we shall not also be caught up in the maelstrom and be swirled along with all the other peoples of the world, no longer able to control our fortunes. We have been given time for amendment of life, but we have no idea how long that time is, nor how great a proportion of it has already been spent. The quickening pace of history, however, suggests that those who are students in the colleges today are unlikely indeed to be able to live out their lives in security and peace. If we try to pierce the mists which obscure the future, we find it to be extraordinarily grim and foreboding. We are living in a world in which, *humanly speaking*, there is no hope of peace, however much we may try to stave off war from day to day, for the globe is dotted with areas of tension, such as the Middle East, South Africa, and Singapore, to name only three, where, as far as we can see at the moment, the situation is passing steadily from bad to worse and year by year is slipping out of our control.

The responsibility in such a situation is that all men should take thought for what repentance means, but particularly those to whom has been given the time to think, that is, those within the community of learning. Where those people are also Christians, men and women who know that because the world is God's creation, therefore righteousness is the only possible effective way of life, these people especially are bound to wrestle with the problem of what righteousness means for the world in which they live. They of all men should be able to interpret to those around them what God is doing with his world.

It is to this situation that all the passages at the head of this chapter are directed. Each one proclaims the majesty and glory and love and mercy of God in a world of great suffering and real misery. None of them hides from us the fact that the righteousness of God is absolute and cannot be altered to suit our convenience. When men are satisfied with something other than righteousness, when they worship strange gods, they are doomed to disaster, for only righteousness can be effective. Nevertheless, even when disaster comes, it is not a time for despair, but for faith, that incredible kind of faith in God which made Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answer the king, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. *But if not*, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:17). In such a situation, with "men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming in the world" Christ told his disciples to "look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:26, 28).

God is master in his own universe. Though history may slip from our control, it can never escape from his, and his righteousness must be effective, if only we have the kind of faith that makes us hang on to see the result. He is at once "the great and terrible Lord" and the God to whom "belong mercy and forgiveness" (Dan. 9:4, 9). If men grasp this in time and struggle to alter their way of life to bring it more in accord with his, then the words of Isaiah remain true: the danger will disappear, though it is probable that we shall never really know how. We shall be, as Isaiah says, like men who have waked up from a nightmare, but of one thing we may be sure: it will not be because we have somehow frightened our enemies into behaving themselves, but only because behind the bastions which we have built to de-



fend ourselves we have seized the opportunity to reform our way of life.

Naturally, it is always possible that men may not want to change their way of living, or that they may change too late, or that they may even seek to do what we are doing at this moment, to preserve their existing way of life inviolate. The result cannot but be disastrous. Yet, even then we must believe, for we have this assurance that nothing, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). It would be sheer dishonesty to pretend that if men are blind to the vision, as Isaiah said, the result can be anything else except "gloom and darkness," from which we can hope to emerge in no other manner than battered, bruised, and broken.

But we shall emerge, if we are faithful, and that fact is worth all the rest put together.

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